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# The Indigenous Communal Sense in Enrique Dussel's Concept of People

Erick Javier Padilla

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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**THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNAL SENSE IN ENRIQUE  
DUSSEL'S CONCEPT OF *PEOPLE***

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

by  
Erick Javier Padilla  
B.A., University of Puerto Rico, 2018  
May 2020

*To my parents Magaly and Henry, my brother, my fiancée, and my whole family and friends. Also, to the vocation of politics and political philosophy.*

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## Abstract

In *Twenty Theses on Politics*, Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel compares the concept of *people* with two Indigenous terms: The Aztec *altepetl* and the Mayan *Amaq'*. Both concepts mean 'community' or 'people,' and 'us/we.' However, beyond his reference to Carlos Lenkersdorf's book *Filosofar en clave tojolabal* (*Philosophizing in Tojolabal Code*), Dussel delves not further into these Indigenous words and their implications to understand what he means by *people*. Focusing on the work of Carlos Lenkersdorf (2005), Gladys Tzul Tzul (2018), Alejandra Aquino Moreschi (2013), Raúl Madrid (2014) and Josef Estermann (2006), I shall examine how the political proceeding of distinct Latin American Indigenous communities, literally changes the manner in which Dussel's concept of *people* is understood in non-Indigenous realities. Indeed, among Indigenous peoples, a search for an alternative political system is commonplace. I will examine that search especially in the Tojol ab'al, K'iche', and Andean instance; and, taking guidance from Dussel's notion of *people*, I will examine how there may be a solution to be found in the political participation of the citizenry made by consensus. This political resolution may, in turn, be instrumental in the creation of a new notion of the 'we' in non-Indigenous realities.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

The category of *people*, which is not often regarded as a scientific interpretive category, and less sociological, is, I think, a true category of interpretation. Much broader, ambivalent and therefore richer category than many other categories used.

-- Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía ética latinoamericana* 6/III

Through this thesis project I aim to evaluate the concept of *people* brought by Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel in *Twenty Thesis on Politics*.<sup>1</sup> Even though there are few Western philosophers who worked and are engaged with the concept of *people* (i.e. Maurice Blanchot, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others) Dussel acknowledges that the *people*, as a concept and as a reality, must be interpreted and defined by Latin American political theorists and philosophers who care for Latin American political and social reality. Then, Latin America is at the center of what Dussel understands by *people*, and this thesis project cannot be comprehended if it is not through a receptive attitude towards the sense of community in some Latin American specific contexts.<sup>2</sup>

As we will analyze, some Latin American Indigenous communities tend to live the sense of unity. For instance, the ‘us/we’ of the Tojol ab’al Indigenous community of

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<sup>1</sup> Enrique Dussel’s concept of *people* begins to be developed in *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana* (1973) volumes one to three; the third volume is titled *Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana. De la erótica a la pedagógica de la liberación* (1977). Few years later, Dussel writes *La producción teórica de Marx* (1985) and *Hacia un Marx desconocido: Un comentario de los manuscritos del 61-63* (1988) in which he returns again to the concept of *people*. Finally, and more recently, Dussel published an article on populism titled “Cinco tesis sobre ‘populismo’” in his book *Filosofías del sur. Descolonización y transmodernidad* (2015). The reason I concentrate most of my analysis of the concept of *people* on *Twenty Thesis on Politics* is because this book constitutes, for the most part, a study of politics through Dussel’s understanding of what the *people* are. \*I am in debt with the Chilean historian Gabriel Salazar who share with me the above information on Dussel’s history, approach and development of the concept of *people*.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting, the concept *people* has a Latin American connotation not only because it resembles the Indigenous sense of community but because in Latin America the *people* (*el pueblo*, in Spanish), as it does the *community*, represents a unique sense of familiarity (*familiaridad*), unity, and collaborative work around familiar and non-familiar members. See Gladys Tzul Tzul, “Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena: La organización de la reproducción de la vida,” *Epistemologías del Sur*, Edited by María Paula Meneses and Karina Bidaseca. CLASCO, 2018.

Chiapas, Mexico, represents a vivid example of how communal work and daily life interactions shape the cosmovision of some Indigenous communities practicing complementarity and unity of their members in order to survive.<sup>3</sup> The *people* act in a similar way. As we will see, the *people* always behave as a community willing to survive. In fact, our evaluation of the dynamism of the concept of *people* could represent a unique analysis of social protests in the Puerto Rican instance and the role the participation of the citizenry, especially the most vulnerable and affected ones, constitute and how they resemble the reality of Indigenous communities when they are not heard as individuals.<sup>4</sup> However, the *people* are not defined by the quantity of members they have. On the other hand, how the members of the community decide what is better for the community will determine if they act as a 'we,' as a *people*. Thus, the concept of *people* is a conceptualization of what can be identified in a political active moment upon a specific group and its participants. Dussel will guide us to acknowledge how the *people* act and why they act as they do.

In addition, in this thesis the 'I' of Western consciousness will not have the significance of the 'we'. The 'we' functions, at least for the Tojol ab'al, as a characteristic that gives limits to the leader 'I'. This sense of 'we' overcomes egotism by fizzling any type of self-recognition in the political area. Also, the 'we' challenges the ethics of Western

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<sup>3</sup> Although there are many Indigenous communities in Latin America which can be included in this thesis project, I decided to dedicate my attention to the Tojolabal community, as studied by Carlos Lenkerdorf (2005). However, I will present the work of Gladys Tzul Tzul (2018), Alejandra Aquino Moreschi (2013), Raúl Madrid (2014) and Josef Estermann (2006) to introduce the reader to the work of other academics studying, for instance, Guatemalan and Andean Indigenous communities where the sense of community is comparable or juxtaposed to the Tojolabal.

<sup>4</sup> In this thesis project, I will briefly study the social protest that took place in Puerto Rico during the summer of 2019.

society by focusing not in the individual but in the collective. For this reason, it is worth pointing out straight away that another characteristic of the *people* is their aiming to reach one goal by working together. This action of working together cannot leave behind neither women nor men, neither able-bodied persons nor disabled ones, and so forth.

As we will see, the concept of *people* not only give the characteristics of what constitutes the *people* but how they appear in political reality. Dussel opens the discussion with an approach on why the *people* are outside the current political system and are those capable of establishing a new one. The *people*, indeed, as were recognized not as participants of political decisions, then, they represent the alterity of the system, the Other of the political organism. Thus, the *people* constitute the principle of political responsibility. That is, without the participation of the *people*, politics does not enact its ethical power and politicians are not responsible with their capacity to serve, hear, and receive orders.

For Dussel, democratic politicians should follow orders from the *people*, who are those who, living outside the political system, have clearer minds to contemplate a new system.

Dussel writes,

Distant thinkers, those who had a perspective of the center from the periphery, those who had to define themselves in the presence of an already established image of the human person and in the presence of uncivilized fellow humans, the newcomers, the ones who hope



because they are always outside, these are the ones who have a clear mind for pondering reality.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the *people* appear to reorganize and/or create a new system. However, they do not work alone. The *people* have a broader understanding of the current system since they come from below as a unit, a community, who experience the needs of their members and how the current system does not promote the needs of these. It is the aim of the *people* to commit themselves to reorganize society and take precedence over anything that means the corruption of life.

Finally, it is fundamental to contextualize the scheme in which *people* and power inhabits. For Dussel, the *people* are power. If the politicians recognize the existence of the *people*, their responsibility is to address themselves to them. For Dussel, politicians ought to preserve the life in all its forms, by paying obligatory attention to the life of their communities. For this reason, according to Dussel, what should be considered for administering a community as a politician is that the community is life represented by its members and must be preserved through an obedience of their demands and human needs.

### **1.1. Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided in five chapters, including the Introduction (Chapter 1) and the Conclusion (Chapter 5). The second chapter will investigate the sense of community in some Mayan-Guatemalan and Andean communities in Latin America, paying special attention to the concept of ‘we’ developed by Carlos Lenkersdorf (2005) through his philosophical approach to the Mayan Indigenous community of Chiapas, Mexico, calls the

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<sup>5</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. By Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky, Orbis books, Maryknoll, New York: 1985.

Tojol ab'al. Following the investigation of Lenkersdorf on the Tojol ab'al 'we,' which is reflected in his book *Filosofar en clave tojolabal* (*Philosophizing in Tojolabal Code*) and his article "Nosotros, otra realidad" ("We, Another Reality"), I will provide a concise description of how this Mayan-Indigenous community of Chiapas live, share and practice the notion of the community.

In chapter 3, I introduce the concept of *people* considering the communal and political sense of power represented by Indigenous communities studied in chapter 2; especially the Tojol ab'al. The idea of the *people* as power will be interpellated by the exercise of delegation of power shared by Indigenous communities. However, as Dussel points out, sometimes the delegation of power operates as the scission between the *people* and their power. That is, those who receive the delegated power of the *people* became susceptible to use this power for their own benefit. In light of this situation, the *people* respond to the corruption of political power and seek to transform the system in agreement to their will to live as a community.

Nevertheless, when political representatives save political power for their own benefit, the *people* become excluded, and the Others of a political system based on the capacities of the politicians not on the sense of community (chapter 4). The insistence of the primacy or preeminence of the *people* upon their political representatives will set the basis upon which we will explain the negative effects of the invalidated interaction between the *people* and the internal government. When the internal government does not take care of the demands of the *people*, the sense of community becomes null and void. Meanwhile, as the political power does not function if it is not in community, it is fundamental to

approach the *people* as political power; this, subsequently, will make possible to evidence the sense of responsibility in politics.

## Chapter 2. The Origin of the Concept of *People*

The Aztec term *altepetl* and the Mayan term *Amaq* refer to the ‘community’ or the *pueblo*, and even vividly to the ‘we’ that has been forgotten by modern, Western experience. As a result, in Latin America – through the indigenous influence that permeates the continent – the word *pueblo* means something more profound than merely ‘the *people*’ in romance languages.  
-- Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*

The Spanish word *pueblo* (*people*) evolved from the Latin word *populus* which means “human community.”<sup>6</sup> However, according to Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, the *people*, as a concept, receives a special meaning depending on the social context where it is utilized. For instance, Dussel argues that the concept of *people* in Latin America can be associated with the Aztec *altepetl* and the Mayan *Amaq* which describe the importance and the sense of unity in Indigenous communities.<sup>7</sup> In the Aztecs and Mayan socio-political reality, the community is part of the lifestyle and even the language.<sup>8</sup> Hence, Latin America had and has a definition of *people* influenced by the strong Indigenous socio-political organization. In order to investigate more deeply what the indigenous influence consists on, in this chapter I introduce the sense of communality in three Latin American Indigenous societies, emphasizing my analysis on the Tojol ab'al, K'iche', and Andean contexts. In view of the verticality of most of the prevailing political systems in the

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<sup>6</sup> Michiel de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and Other Italic Languages*, Leiden, Boston, 2008. P. 480.

<sup>7</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*. Translated by George Ciccariello-Maher, Duke University Press, 2008. Hereafter cited as “TTP” followed by page number. TTP, 74.

Also, for more information on the *altepetl* see Laura E. Matthew, chapter 4 “The Primacy of Place: Ciudad Vieja as Indian Town & Colonial Altepetl,” *Memories of Conquest: Becoming Mexicano in Colonial Guatemala*, University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

For more information on the *Amaq* see Gladys Tzul Tzul, “Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena: La organización de la reproducción de la vida,” *Epistemologías del Sur*, edited by María Paula Meneses and Karina Bidaseca, CLACSO, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on how language contains the sense of community in the Mayan-Tojolabal Indigenous see Carlos Lenkersdorf, chapter 3 “El NOSOTROS palabra-clave” and chapter 6 “El NOSOTROS y la lingüística,” *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, Miguel Ángel Porrúa, México, 2005.

world, there is good reason to make a case for re-evaluating political organization towards the future following the meaning and the communal sense of this Latin American Indigenous communities.

## 2.1. Introduction to the Tojol ob'al Community

In 1972 the German philosopher Carlos Lenkersdorf went to Chiapas, Mexico, to coexist with the *tojolabales*. In one communal meeting he attended, the *tojolabales* repeated numerous times the word *-tik*. The repetition of this word caught his attention, even though the repetition of words and terms in conversations among the members of this Indigenous community is common (run-of-the-mill, to be more specific) and does not have a special meaning.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the repetition of words in Tzeltal, the Mayan language spoken by the *tojolabales* is not uncommon since this language has only 300 words. However, Lenkersdorf was impressed by the word *-tik* which is not only part of the Tojol ab'al vocabulary, but also a result of the communal lifestyle.<sup>10</sup> Lenkersdorf explains in his article "Nosotros, otra realidad" ("We, Another Reality") that the catholic priest of the community he was visiting told him that the word *-tik* can be translated as 'we' or 'us.'<sup>11</sup> Interestingly enough, the constant repetition of the *-tik* eclipses the prominence the 'I' has in Western contexts.<sup>12</sup> The *-tik* or 'we' points toward a certain lack of interest the Tojol ab'al

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<sup>9</sup> As Jill Brody (2004) states, "el alto nivel de repetición es típico de la plática cotidiana entre personas íntimas" (p. 75). For more information on the notion of repetition in the Tzeltal language see Jill Brody, "Comunidad es familia, acuerdo es repetición: Relación entre dos metáforas claves en tojol ab'al," *La metáfora en mesoamérica*, edited by Mercedes Montes de Oca Vega, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Lenkersdorf, "Nosotros, otra realidad," *Comunicação & política*, n.s., v. VII, n. 2, p. 161-079. My translation. Hereafter cited as "NOR" followed by page number. All translations are mine. NOR, 161

<sup>11</sup> For practical purposes, I will use the word 'we' referring to what Lenkersdorf writes as *nosotros*.

<sup>12</sup> I will say that if the majority of Western languages follows a self-referential understanding of the world through the use of language, as it is meant by the *ego cogito* (I think) of the French philosopher René

community has on living individually and selfishly. For the *tojolabales*, human needs to live with others in order to survive. Community requires represents unity, security, and thus, life. Then, the *tojolabales* through their language points toward a new dimension of inter- and intrapersonal relationships, where complementarity and unity are at the center. However, to imply that just the *tojolabales* has the notion of complementarity, unity, and the ‘we’ briefly displayed above would not do justice to what Dussel writes in the quote I introduced at the beginning of the chapter. Hence, before explaining a little bit more in depth what the sense of the ‘we’ means for the Tojol ab’al community, I want to introduce other voices to the sense of communal live and organization in other Indigenous communities in Latin America.

## **2.2. Communal Life and Organization in the K’iche’ Indigenous Community**

As Indigenous scholar of Guatemala, Gladys Tzul Tzul makes evident in her article “Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena: La organización de la reproducción de la vida” (“Indigenous Community Governance Systems: The Organization of the Reproduction of Life”), it is crucial and even fundamental to contemplate through a communal code and standpoint what is Indigenous. Because most of the indigenous communities in Latin America has survived together battles and confrontations against traders and even political authorities who want to turn Indigenous lands into private properties to subtract or use material resources from them, the sense of unity and family constitutes and forges an occasion for communities to survive. As Tzul writes in her article,

The struggle has been constant and while they resist expropriation, they produce legal-political strategies to control the concrete means

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Descartes, the communal *-tik* adds a new moment for inter-philosophical dialogues on communal life and its interpellation to the I’s standpoint for interpreting reality.

for their daily life, organize massive communal and religious festivals, make requests to ask for rain or to thank for the harvest, they self-regulate themselves and also on several occasions have dismissed their authorities when they fail to comply with the decisions produced in the assemblies.<sup>13</sup>

For the K'iche', the Mayan-Indigenous community of Guatemala Tzul belongs to, the Indigenous sense of community involves religious ceremonies, chants, and festivities around the theme of nature as a whole and as a mother; the place where all of us live and reproduce in. The communal governance system the K'iche' practices, is based in assemblies organized by and for the community, where women and men reach consensus concerning daily affairs and the distribution of caring for the land.

Because defending the land is a constant demand for assuring life, all concrete means having relation with the survival of the community ought to be protected. Gladys states,

When I say concrete means for the reproduction of life, I mean the territory and all that contains it, to say: water, roads, forests, cemeteries, schools, sacred places, rituals; in short, the concrete and symbolic wealth that communities produce and govern through a series of strategies guided from a specific space and time that are structured from each unit of reproduction.<sup>14</sup>

Life in all its dimensions is not taken for granted for the K'iche'. The community plays the role of defending life, so it is life which dwells at the center of the community. It forges political and social structures, the agricultural system, the familiar organization, and even

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<sup>13</sup> “Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena: La organización de la reproducción de la vida,” *Epistemologías del Sur*, edited by María Paula Meneses and Karina Bidaseca, CLACLSO, 2018. Hereafter cited as “SGCI” followed by page number. All translations are mine. SGCI, 385.

<sup>14</sup> SGCI, 386.

the manner in which service is practice. For Tzul, the power of the community is in the service: *k'ax k'ol*.<sup>15</sup>

*K'ax K'ol* denotes the work or service (*k'ol*) as something that is painful (*k'ax*) but practiced in community. All men, women, and children are committed with the *k'ax k'ol* as it is part of everyday life for the K'iche' and necessary for the sustainability and reproduction of life in all its dimensions within and outside the community. Also, communal work guides the decision-making process and the political coordination the community practices with itself and other communities, and the organization of festivities to celebrate life or mourn and lament the loss of any loved one.<sup>16</sup> Of these aspects or characteristics of communal life which are affected by the service provided by the K'iche', I want to stop briefly on the decision-making process and how it is practiced by this Mayan community.

The K'iche' people have a communal authority formed by some political officials elected every year in communal assemblies. Every man and woman of the community has the responsibility to participate in the assemblies since the decisions made are reach by collective consensus. In the communal assemblies the community can decide how to reforest the woodland and with what species, how to organized rallies or protest and defend their lands, how to divide the *k'ax k'ol*, and so on.<sup>17</sup> Depending on what is the purpose or the necessity of holding an assembly, the community could celebrate extraordinary

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<sup>15</sup> SGCI, 388.

<sup>16</sup> According to Tzul there are four types of communal work: Service as a way of decision, service as a way of coordination, service as a manner to organize a festivity, and service as a way to overcome pain. For more information see SGCI, 390.

<sup>17</sup> SGCI, 394.



meetings where they discuss urgent concerns and issues of relevance to the survival of the community. What is significant here is that assemblies are self-conveyed by the community whenever it demands so or when the situation requires immediate action.

This decision-making process is not different than the one proposed by the Tojol ab'al and Andean Indigenous communities. For instance, the Andean *runa/jaqi*, that is, the collective experience of the Andean people, forges a concrete and symbolic cosmovision that affects the political realm of the Andean Indigenous communities.<sup>18</sup> Josef Ertermann in his book *Filosofía andina: Sabiduría indígena para un mundo nuevo* (*Andean Philosophy: Indigenous Wisdom for a New World*) reflects on this collective experiential linking Indigenous communities of the Andes have for experiencing reality and forge communal everydayness.

### **2.3. Collective Experience in the *runa/jaqi* of Andean Indigenous Communities**

The experience of unity in collectives is also found in Andean Indigenous communities around the experience of *runa/jaqi*. The *runa/jaqi* as Estermann defines it is “the concrete and collective experience of the Andean human in his physic and symbolic universe.”<sup>19</sup> The Andean who Estermann associates with the *runa/jaqi* speaks Quechua or Aymara, and evolved from the Incan empire called *Tawantinsuyu*.<sup>20</sup> Whether in the organization of

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<sup>18</sup> Josef Estermann, *Filosofía andina: Sabiduría indígena para un mundo nuevo*, 2da. Ed. La Paz: ISEAT, 2006. Hereafter cited as “FA” followed by page number. All translations are mine. FA, 74.

<sup>19</sup> FA, 74.

<sup>20</sup> According to Estermann, “this empire called “Tawantinsuyu” (‘the four regions’) had even extended from Anqasmayu river, in the Knot of the Pasto in Colombia, in the north, until the Chilean Central Valley, between Maule and Biobio rivers, in the south. From the Pacific coast to the Amazonian Ceja de Selva, and the areas of Tucuman and Mendoza in northwest Argentina. Thus, it practically became a Pan-Andean imperial state.” FA, 69.

communal work or the *ayllu* (peasant community),<sup>21</sup> the communal experience of the *runa/jaqi* is present and in operation up to date.

*Runa*, which in Quechua literally means ‘human being,’ and *jaqi*, which is the Aymaran word for ‘person’ or ‘human being,’ represent for Estermann the Andean communal sense of living in the Andean region.<sup>22</sup> The sense of community for the Andean dwells around symbols, religious ceremonies, and the manner in which the people interact between them.<sup>23</sup> As we briefly saw with the Tojol ab’al community, the language is part of the communal organization and structure. But language is neither for the Tojol ab’al nor for the Andean Indigenous the only way of expressing intrapersonal relationships and cohesion within communal lives. The lived experience of the *runa/jaqi* consists not in what you can say as an individual but in what can be shared with the community as part of it. For instance, in reference to the lack of ‘philosophers’ or ‘critical theorists’ in Indigenous communities of the Andes Estermann explains that “the true philosophical subject is the anonymous and collective *runa/jaqi*, the Andean human being with his/her collective and unconscious experiential inheritance, the great community of human beings, related in time and space for a common experience and interpretation.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, what is valued by the Andean Indigenous communities is the shared and coexisted experience of the *runa/jaqi*.

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<sup>21</sup> As Estermann states, “there is no exact translation of the *quechuamara* word *ayllu*: on the one hand, it is an ethnic unity of the Andean peasant community, on the other hand, the extended family, and on another sense the people [*pueblo*] or the village [*aldea*] in a geographic (*mark’a*) sense” FA, 220; [my emphasis].

<sup>22</sup> FA, 65.

<sup>23</sup> FA, 78.

<sup>24</sup> FA, 87.

The preeminence of the collective and common is such that to imagine myself as a self-sustaining individual or even disown of my participation in the community is to deprive myself of existence. In Estermann words,

the individual as such is a 'nothing' (a 'non-being'), is something totally lost if not inserted into a network of multiple relationships. If a person no longer belongs to the local community (*ayllu*), because he was expelled or because he has opted it out by his own act, it is as if he no longer existed; an isolated and unrelated person is a (socially) dead entity.<sup>25</sup>

The *runa/jaqi* disvalues any type of egoism since there is nothing outside the network of ties unifying human beings with others. The ties of relation for the *runa/jaqi* are fundamental at such a level that, for instance, a transcendental and unrelated God is unimaginable or unconceivable for the Andean Indigenous.<sup>26</sup> Thus, even God is a related being; as the Andeans are.<sup>27</sup>

For this reason, the principle of correspondence is fundamental in the *runa/jaqi* context. As Estermann states, “‘Correspondence’ (*con + respondere*) etymologically implies a correlation, a mutual and bidirectional relation between two ‘fields’ [campos] of ‘reality’.”<sup>28</sup> Nothing in the Andean world is an independent ‘being’ or exists independently. Correspondence and co-existence are always actively playing in humans-to-humans,

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<sup>25</sup> FA, 110.

<sup>26</sup> FA, 128.

<sup>27</sup> For Estermann, “the Andean ‘ontology’ is always an ‘*inter-ontology*’” (FA, 128).

<sup>28</sup> FA, 128.

humans-to-God, humans-to-nature relations. This is so since the relation between two or more parts or lives forges or creates the Andean *runa/jaqi*.

It is worth noting that in the *runa/jaqi* the existence of differences does not eliminate the principle of correspondence. The Andean cosmovision allows two distinct or different parts to co-exist as a part of a whole that can be interpreted and is relational with the Tojol ab'al indigenous 'we' as we will see shortly. The correspondence and co-existence proposed by the Andean Indigenous *runa/jaqi* follows the principle of the 'we;' a 'we' that along Guillermo Meza Salcedo argues:

No matter if we speak different languages, have particular customs, even opposing ideologies, and so the concept of 'we' has changed, however, we are not the Spaniards, nor the Portuguese, nor the American, nor the Amerindian but 'we' are all the human beings who inhabit this planet Earth.<sup>29</sup>

This sense of 'we' has not borders but the whole world, a *Pachamama*, a world-mother, where everyone may forge an Indigenous sense of community. However, one might be wondering, is not the current globalization unifying different countries into a world-wide economy, culture, commerce, and even universal history?<sup>30</sup> We no longer have to settle for what is taught at local schools since digital education navigates through social networks and platforms that find no borders thanks to the internet and other digital sources of information. The sense of distance is almost erased due to the efficiency of technological devices capable of communicate two or more individuals even when they are

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<sup>29</sup> Guillermo Meza Salcedo, "El 'vivir nosotros' amerindio vs 'decir nosotros' de la globalización", Cuadernos de filosofía latinoamericana, Vol. 37, No. 114, pp. 151-166. 2016. Hereafter cited as "EVNA" followed by page number. All translations are mine. EVNA, 161.

geographically distanced. As Guillermo Meza Salcedo argues in “El ‘vivir nosotros’ amerindio vs ‘decir nosotros’ de la globalización” (“Amerindian ‘Living Us’ vs ‘Saying Us’ of Globalization”), we begin to believe or “think that we are a united whole, that we are next [*próximo*] and interconnected to each other, that there are neither distances nor barriers between peoples and cultures.”<sup>31</sup> However, globalization has threatened and sometimes replaced direct, face-to-face contact between humans to bring distant relatives together. The trouble is that this model not only unites those who are distant and alienates those who are close, but also favors a vertical political system which creates a tense relationship between indigenous communities and the nation state.

#### **2.4. The Tojol ab'al 'We'**

When reaching to political decisions, the Tojol ab'al community shows no hierarchical structure uniting not the voice of every individual. The leader does not stand out above others since the 'we' leaves no space to operate the community in hierarchical systems; especially, those which main purpose is to benefit a few above the majority.

The predominance of the 'we' in the decision-making process, avoids the Tojol ab'al community falling into fraud and corruption, seen when social, political, and economic status of a person prevails upon the decision-making political result.<sup>32</sup> All the community needs to participate to reach political consensus since the decisions made in communal assemblies are to attend the necessities of all as a 'we.'

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<sup>31</sup> EVNA, 153.

<sup>32</sup> NOR, 162.

Just because the *tojolabales* do not make decisions alone does not mean they have no personal or individual freedom.<sup>33</sup> The value of the ‘we’ for the Tojol ab’al performs a crucial role for individuals once decision-making must be practiced. Even when the *tojolabales* want to take a decision as individuals it must be shared with the rest of the community because the decision of one can affect the whole community. The principle of correspondence we analyzed the Andean Indigenous observed, the *tojolabales* on their part put it into practice as well. Then, it is vital to have the consent of the community first before making a decision by myself alone.

Lenkersdorf affirms that this communal consent could be interpreted by Western thinkers coming from an individualistic culture and society as a lack of individual freedom.<sup>34</sup> However, just because Western thinkers have taken the *ego* or the ‘I’ as a primary factor to achieve liberty, no person started his/her own life alone. Coming from a reality where the ‘we’ is of no value when taking political decisions seems unreasonable for the *tojolabales* since human beings are meant to live with others, co-exist among differences, in order to survive. Just because the Tojol ab’al community does not put the isolated ‘I’ first does not mean they do not value personal liberty. Thus, the issue here is to think critically about engaging with the notion of the ‘we’ from which a new definition of liberty arises. This

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<sup>33</sup> The communal ‘we’ does not give place to the ‘I’ as an auto-sustained individual subject. The importance of the ‘I’ inherited from Western tradition is overcome by the communal idea of survival. As Lenkersdorf states in *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, “[t]he WE, then, does not erase the individual, but gives it space to fulfil its full potential.” (2005: 13). Thus, to survive as a community is to cooperate and act towards one another in the spirit of the ‘we.’ The ‘I,’ then, is respected as part of the ‘we.’ Carlos Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, Miguel Ángel Porrúa, México, 2005. Hereafter cited as “FCT” followed by page number. All translations are mine.

<sup>34</sup> NOR, 165.

does not only require questioning the Western definition of personal liberty but opening ourselves to an unknown communal liberty.

Another aspect that can be criticized of the Tojol ab'al 'we' is the restrictions that it represents to the outsider. In order to be part of the community you must accept the communal life. This demands a commitment to the 'we' lived by the community. A foreigner cannot violate the Tojol ab'al 'we' without the consent of the community. Once they accept the stranger to belong to the communal 'we' there appears for the outsider the first opening to a careless reality in globalizing contexts. However, the recognition of the foreigner to be part of the community leads him/her to an opened communal 'we' sustaining and continuing a mutual existence among differences.

In his opinion, and after visiting the Tojol ab'al community, Lenkersdorf knew it was fundamental for him and those who joined him on the journey to Chiapas, Mexico, that they should interact with the community in order to know it truly. This was crucial to prevent judging from an outside perspective. Thus, Lenkersdorf became the student of a new culture. He learned that to be part of them he must open himself to the unfamiliar. He writes,

In other words, when we entered the country of the WE, we entered as simple students, eager to learn because we know nothing. We are beginners with a fundamental question. From our point of view, there are two questions that we have to answer: Will our minds be flexible enough to open up and grasp the otherness of the unknown culture? [...] Will we be able to become partakers of the WE or will our I hinder our entry?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> NOR, 16

Encountering with the ‘we’ represented a challenge to Lenkersdorf, although it would be the beginning of a more familiar reality than the one proposed by egoistic thinkers. This encounter with the *tojolabales* would be the beginning of a shared, collective, and cooperative dimension of reality. Lenkersdorf was a Western thinker in a non-Western reality. He had to learn as a student. The lack of understanding of the ‘we’ sustained by cultural standards learned by Western understanding of the communal live presented the following question: how to move toward thinking beyond the prejudices scripted in the minds of Westernized people who had no previous experience on a communal live distinguished by the ‘we’?

## **2.5. How Communal Life Is Lived**

The communal life as it is projected by the Tojol ab’al, K’iche’, and Andean communities embodies a challenge to monocultural realities. As Meza Salcedo argues,

The Mayan – Tojolabal – world and the Incan – Quechua – world, worlds still unknown to many, have a cosmovision, and consequently, an experience of the world that can be found in their language still in force, but above all in their own living, a cosmovision very different from the monocultural cosmovision that is known and proposed as a paradigm by the current processes of globalization.<sup>36</sup>

One of the problems of the monocultural cosmovision proposed by globalization, for instance, is permeating the reality of pluricultural and even plurinational countries (as they are Guatemala, Peru, Mexico, Brazil, and others) and create of them members of an

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<sup>36</sup> EVNA, 155.



universalization starring Western civilization.<sup>37</sup> In such a context, plurinational countries has to assume the role of being part of a culture erasing cultural differences in order to eliminate poverty from the map. The problem is that the idea of development or progress has little to do with the Indigenous sense of community.

In his article “The Future of Indigenous Parties in Latin America” the political scientist Raúl L. Madrid states that “[a]lthough the vast majority of the population of Latin America is at least partly of indigenous descent, most Latin Americans identify as mestizo (mixed), rather than as indigenous.”<sup>38</sup> They do not want to be identified as Indigenous since most Indigenous people live under the poverty line according to an study conducted by the World Bank.<sup>39</sup> In such a context, “[e]ven people who speak an indigenous language and maintain traditional indigenous practices and customs often prefer to self-identify as mestizo.”<sup>40</sup> As it seems, it is saner to assume a ‘folkloric’ vision of Indigenous customs,

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<sup>37</sup> Here I use Gerónimo Romero Huayna’s (2007) definition of globalization: “Globalization is an ambiguous concept in itself, probably as ubiquitous as that of development that influenced the countries of the southern hemisphere with negative consequences at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In what sense is it ambiguous and ubiquitous? It is a process that influenced by the incessant development of modern science and technology, brings with it the uncertainty of its trends, its changes announce and hide the dominance of science and technology as the absolute dominance over human society and civilization. It also makes effective for the first time the universalization of Western civilization that was an unfinished and unrealized dream of the modernity of the 20th century, in which we could conceive forms of imperialism in the relations between technologically developed societies and cultures and the less developed ones that aspired to become more just and modern societies.” (2007: 31-32). Gerónimo Romero Huayna, *La globalización: Una plataforma de exclusión de los pueblos indígenas*, Fondo para el desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas de América latina y el Caribe, La Paz, Bolivia: 2007. Hereafter cited as “LG” followed by page number. All translations are mine.

<sup>38</sup> Raúl Madrid, “The Future of Indigenous Parties in Latin America”, *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 32-36. 2014. Hereafter cited as “TFIP” followed by page number. All translations are mine. TFIP, 33.

<sup>39</sup> TFIP, 33.

<sup>40</sup> TFIP, 33.

traditions, and cosmovision rather than committing to the simple way of life most of them own in order to survive as a community.

For instance, for the Tojol ab'al, there is no private property.<sup>41</sup> The earth is property of no body. As Lenkersdorf states, "the soil, the land represents Our Mother Earth who, of course, is not owned by anyone, just as our mother is not owned by anyone. Selling her would turn her into a prostitute."<sup>42</sup> Thus, how citizens could become rich and experience the 'economic benefits' of globalization in a community where the land is not meant to be sold nor exploited? Faced with the need to get out of economic poverty, the Indigenous proposal is not attractive. However, the problem of globalization looks also unattractive to most of the Indigenous communities. In *La globalización: Una plataforma de exclusión de los pueblos indígenas* (*Globalization: A Platform of Exclusion for Indigenous Peoples*), Gerónimo Romero Huayna states,

According to studies and research, poor populations have been identified as those who do not have electricity, have rustic housing, do not have water and sewage services and are fed with products they produce (barley, quinoa, chuño, etc.), do not have adequate education. This definition contrasts with a disproportionate perception of the population's daily life. For the indigenous people there are no poor people and this way of qualifying the only thing it does is to deepen the exclusion, motivating the indigenous people to leave their customs and their food diet, they must consume what there is in the market and stop eating what they produce so as not to be poor.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> NOR, 169.

<sup>42</sup> NOR, 169.

<sup>43</sup> Gerónimo Romero Huayna, *La globalización: Una plataforma de exclusión de los pueblos indígenas*, Fondo para el desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas de América latina y el Caribe, La Paz, Bolivia: 2007. Hereafter cited as "LG" followed by page number. All translations are mine. LG, 30.

The Indigenous would continue to be considered ‘poor people’ as they continue living the way they do. In the background, what is globalization doing in such situation is homogenizing what is culturally, economically, and in its cosmovision heterogenous and diverse. What need to appreciate those who advocate or defend a globalized world are the benefits of the Indigenous sense of community. Against a globalization proposing an economic prosperity only benefiting transnational interests at the expenses of the exclusion of native peoples, the latter can demonstrate to the world the advantages of practicing not only the Indigenous economic life but also its judicial and socio-political organization.

In the economic realm, each one of the members of the Tojol ab'al community who harvest the land sees the soil as ‘Our Mother Earth’ since she does not belong only to the farmers who harvest but to every creature who exists and benefits from all she has to offer. The economy is adapted to the intrinsic relationship between the ‘we’ and ‘Our Mother Earth.’ There cannot be authentic communal economy without a dependable sense of ‘Our Mother Earth.’ For instance, when two commoners greet each other, they wonder about the status of their *milpas*.<sup>44</sup> They do not ask about your milpa but about ours. This central relationship between the commoners and the communal ‘we’ is resembled by their communication and the way they manage the soil. Even though the soil is not worked by all the members of the community but by a few of them, the whole community recognize the land does not belong to the commoners but to the communal ‘we’ as all are benefited by

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<sup>44</sup> As Analisa Taylor (2017) states, the “milpa is a cornfield, intercropped with beans, squash, and a wide variety of other useful plants” (p. 47). Thus, the milpa is not a monoculture, but a polyculture; it represents one of the characteristics of the codependent Indigenous communal life. See Analisa Taylor, "Milpa: Mesoamerican Resistance to Agricultural Imperialism," *Modern Mexican Culture*, The University of Arizona Press, 2017.

what it has to offer. Thus, there is a codependent and complementary relationship between ‘Our Mother Earth’ and the whole community.

The second dimension that is benefited from the Indigenous communal sense is the judicial system.<sup>45</sup> Before a Western legal system that separates the criminal from the community to pay for his/her crimes, the Indigenous legal system preserves its communal sense by reintegrating the lawbreaker to the community. Further, if one of the members of the community commits a legal crime, the community, affected by the action of the criminal, identifies itself with the illegal action of its member and decide what punishment will impose on him/her.

Because of its communal nature, the Tojol ab’al community has no prisons in its village since incarceration impedes or delays the active participation of the member(s) in the ‘we.’ So, the criminals must pay their faults collaborating with the communal ‘we’ through supervised works. To ground justice on the ‘we’ means to accept the responsibility to pay the fault in a social context both communal and familiar. In this case it is the moment when the criminals find themselves reintegrated to the communal ‘we.’

In the Tojol ab’al justice, as Lenkersdorf writes, “[t]he entire community brings together the roles of victim, judge and jury.”<sup>46</sup> Differently, to be a criminal in the Western and globalized world is a misfortune because the criminal is not allowed to be accompanied or attended by and in the community. The prison becomes the new ‘community’ where the rules are dictated by a sovereign. The problem behind this Western type of punishment is

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<sup>45</sup> See NOR, 169 – 171.

<sup>46</sup> NOR, 172.

that the prisoner does not feel support in the same manner as it is exercised in the Tojol ab'al context, for example. For the *tojolabales*, it is ordinary that the community feels responsibility to decide over the penalty it will be inflicted on the criminal so both the latter and the community recognize and pay the crime against and as the 'we.'

Carlos Lenkersdorf points out that the Tojol ab'al community is not "interested in punishing, nor does it intend to take revenge on the damage suffered. [...] Prison punishment would separate criminals from society and family. Society is diminished by two members and families are impoverished because no one will fill the work of the incarcerated."<sup>47</sup> This level of justice questions the Western notion of criminal justice which separates the criminal from his/her community. As Enrique Dussel states in his book *Twenty Thesis on Politics*,

For example, in modern law - with its long history that begins with Roman or medieval law - those who kill another are imprisoned, sometimes for life. Among Mayans in Chiapas, those who kill another member of the community are punished, in the first place, by having to cultivate the land of the deceased in order to feed the family that has been left without sustenance.<sup>48</sup>

As it seems, the Tojol ab'al has a more rational, humane, and saner judicial system than the practiced and financed in Western civilization. The *tojolabales* recognize that the criminal must pay his/her crime in the community, cultivating the land, and assuming the responsibility of correspondence. Further, if the criminal has killed another person, neither the community nor the family of the deceased lose; what is made as a member of the community is seen as an act of the 'we,' and must be paid as such. Engaging the dynamic

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<sup>47</sup> NOR, 172.

<sup>48</sup> TTP, 123.

cosmovision of the Tojol ab'al legal procedure is guaranteeing a judicial system which ensures community's welfare by leaving no one behind.

The third dimension of the Tojol ab'al communal lifestyle ought to be distinguished is their socio-political system. Between the years 1970 to 1980, while working with the Tojol ab'al-Spanish and Spanish-Tojol ab'al dictionary, it was written the following phrase: "ja ma' 'ay ya' tel kujtiki mandar 'ay kujtik'."<sup>49</sup> In English it means: "In the community WE are the commoners who control our authorities."<sup>50</sup>

As a peculiar feature of Tojol ab'al politics that contrasts with Western democracy, community members choose their political representatives without them having to go around campaigning. The process of electing political candidates takes place at community meetings where the community nominates, confirms, and chooses the next members who will represent and serve the community politically. As the community is the actor choosing the political authorities, the community always constitutes the political power that controls the authorities, that is, the internal government.

Political power belongs to the community and is never exercised in meetings where the community cannot participate. Differently, the internal government, who is the representation of the whole community, has the obligation to hear and respond to the community's orders, demands, and requests made and reached by consensus. Political authorities are named 'ja ma' 'ay ya tel,' which means "those who work."<sup>51</sup> In this Mayan

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<sup>49</sup> NOR, 179.

<sup>50</sup> NOR, 179.

<sup>51</sup> NOR, 179.

community, the internal government is obliged to obey and observe the community's orders by what is called 'command by obeying.'<sup>52</sup>

## **2.6. Command by Obeying**

To be obedient is neither synonym with the subjugation of the community under the political authorities nor with a possible privilege the community has to misuse its political power. In a different way, to be politically obedient is to recognize that the community has full capacity for self-government and that it does not need political leaders to make decisions on behalf of the community without first consulting it. Thus, first and foremost, the political authorities are proposed and elected by the community. In this way, the political authorities recognize that they have received a political responsibility on behalf of the whole community. Second, political authorities from the beginning have been mandated or instructed by the consensus of the entire community. Hence, third and finally, the task of the political authorities is to ensure that each member of the community assumes political responsibility and participates in community meetings so that decisions made can have the consent of each individual.

It is common that in community meetings the views of certain members do not agree. Thus, the task of the political authorities is to ensure that even if the views are different, agreements can be reached. In this way, it is avoided that the community cannot reach agreements and that the decisions taken do not have communal significance. In Dussel's words the above can be translated into the following:

But the *wills* of each of the members of the community could also be directed toward the acquisition of their multiple and opposing

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<sup>52</sup> As Dussel states, "'Command obeying" is an indigenous phrase popularized by the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas." TTP, 19.

private interests, and in this way the *potency* or strength of the will of the individual can annul that of others, thereby resulting in *impotence*, or a lack of power. On the other hand, if these wills were able to *join together* their objectives, their purposes, and their strategic ends, then they would achieve – by organically combining strength in a “common-will-to-live” – a higher degree of power-as-potential (*potentia*).<sup>53</sup>

In this way, the political authorities should direct and supervise the communal meetings to avoid that the disagreements between members become a communal impotence where there are internal divisions due to lack of consensus.

In this way, obediential power must be the motto or adage of the communal political authorities. The political authorities must humbly assume their political office. Their job is mainly to obey the community as a whole because they know that without the community they would not be working as political authorities. Furthermore, since commanding by obeying ensures that what the community agrees upon is executed and implemented, political leaders must be faithful not to some members but to the community as a whole. In this way, political leaders are prevented from becoming corrupt, since the corruption of the communal political system begins when the communal agreement is not put into practice.

## **2.7. Delegation of Political Power**

Some might be wondering why the Tojol ab'al community delegates its power into the hands of a few. Usually this endangers the political participation of the rest of the community since they do not have as much political presence as the representative in meetings or political affairs. This can make 1) the representative feel that his/her political duty first depends on his/her capacity to make decisions on behalf of the community as if

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<sup>53</sup> TTP, 14.



he/she were the center of political power and 2) the community, for its part, disengage from their political responsibility. However, the reality is and can be different if we look at it from the Tojol ab'al perspective. To have direct democracy, that is, active political participation of the community, it demands the assistance of the political representatives, members of the internal government, who recollect the demands of the community to make possible the institutionalization of political power (*potestas*, as Enrique Dussel calls it).<sup>54</sup> However, the delegation of political power requires obedience from the internal government so that it can work. In fact, it is obligatory or mandatory that the community participate. But the reality in most of our societies is that the internal government does not always obey the community's demands, and so political power becomes corrupted, monopolized, and fetishized by the few. Dussel states,

The political as such is *corrupted* as a totality when its essential function is distorted or destroyed at its origin. [...] This *originary corruption* of the political, which I will call the *fetishism of power*, consists of the moment in which the political actor (the members of the political community, whether citizens or representatives) believes that power affirms his or her subjectivity or the institution in which he or she functions – as a “functionary,” whether it be as president, representative, judge, governor, soldier, police officer – as the *center* or *source* of political power. This is how, for example, the State comes to be affirmed as the sovereign and as the power of last resort, and this represents the fetishism of the power of the State and the *corruption* of all those who seek to exercise State power defined in this way.<sup>55</sup>

For the Tojol ab'als, the obedience of the representatives and the whole community towards the ‘we’ is always building the socio-political system. The mere existence of the ‘we’

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<sup>54</sup> In the next chapter we will discuss what *potestas* means and what are its implications in the political dimension.

<sup>55</sup> TTP, 4.

compels any non-participatory political activity where the community only accept or reject political candidates without having meetings where the community postulates, confirms, and chooses the political authorities. The non-participatory political system that tends to perform political decisions supported by political representatives elected but not proposed or suggested by the community does not practice the obedience of the representatives since in this political system, most often than not, the candidates are those who have more money to fund their political campaigns, instead of being those who interact more and have a direct relation with the community and its demands.

Further, the hierarchical political system of Western societies tends to perform, decide, and make political decisions without first and foremost consulting the community.<sup>56</sup> On such a model the institutionalization of political power (*potestas*) becomes corrupted.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the Tojol ab'al internal government understands that political power is the community. The political authorities have the responsibility and commitment to ensure and collaborate with the communal 'we' since the community is "the cause or the origin of the fact that they are authorities."<sup>58</sup> In this sense, the community becomes the center or the origin of political power.

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<sup>56</sup> I understand that consulting the whole community every time political decisions are to be made can be utopian as there are countries that are too big to be able to hear the voice of all citizens before decisions are made. However, I understand that this should not be a reason that justifies making decisions in the internal government without taking into consideration that those most affected, the *people*, had no voice or vote in the decision-making process. Perhaps the use of technology can help us in consulting the entire community or the creation of smaller and autonomous political communities interconnected with others can present political solutions to be considered in order to avoid citizen indifference to politics and the self or auto-empowerment of politicians in decision making.

<sup>57</sup> We will delve more in depth on the meaning of *potestas* in the next chapter (chapter 3).

<sup>58</sup> NOR, 178.

## 2.8. Conclusion

Lenkersdorf's analysis in his *Filosofar en clave tojolabal* and "Nosotros otra realidad" brings forth the advantages of the communal 'we' through a social analysis that leaves no other possibility for thought than the admiration of the socio-political aspect of the 'we.' Considering the hierarchical scheme that characterize Western politics, the question is how the Tojol ab'al community will teach us, Westernized subjects, to accept a horizontal political scheme. What is curious here is that the 'we' does not tend to remove the differences between the communal members. Although it was not explained in depth, the *milpa* resembles the 'we' because it is not monoculture. Plurality is part of the Indigenous communities' lifestyle, language, and cosmovision we examined in this chapter.

Also, when one study more closely the Tojol ab'al, K'iche', and Andean communities one finds that the system brought by the communal life can be studied as the ideal example of political power where the power comes from the community. The participation of the community shall not be impeded by hierarchical structures whose organization might constitute the ideal environment for separating the community from their participation. This statement does not mean that all hierarchical structures are a disaster or the foundation for corruption but that hierarchical structures whose structure is not designed to hear the civilians falls short to practice participative democracy; the main motor that is moving the Indigenous sense of community.

How would one get engaged in the Tojol ab'al, K'iche', and Andean reality if not were through their teaching for us a more individualistic society? The prevailing or dominant society, as Lenkersdorf calls it, neither knows the Indigenous sense of community nor seeks to engage into a more horizontal and pluralistic political dimension,

one capable of inciting no egotism or selfish behaviors but participation and consensus. However, it is through the study of Indigenous words such as *-tik*, *k'ax k'ol*, and *runa/jaqi* and the manner all of them resemble the Indigenous communal reality that we might recognize how a more collaborative and participatory system works and benefits the economic, judicial, and socio-political system of a community.

In the following chapter we will delve into details of what the concept *potentia* and *potestas* mean. These concepts are fundamental to understand why the community is political power when it is at the center of political actions. Is it correct to affirm that political power belongs to the internal government and that only they are responsible for assuming the reins of democracy? What about the community? Does it have political power? Is there a solution for avoiding corrupted, monopolized, or fetishized political power? The answers to these questions will be instrumental to comprehend what Enrique Dussel means by *people* and what similarities and differences stem from the Indigenous sense of community.

## Chapter 3. The Concept of *People* in Light of the Indigenous Communal Sense

The importance of the WE exclude the emphasis on the individual, in particular the *ego*. The WE absorbs the individual and requires their incorporation into the US, by requiring the contribution of each, woman or man, to the *grupo nosótrico* [us the group]. This contribution requires and mobilizes all the capacities of the challenged individual. The WE, then, does not erase the individual, but gives it space to fulfil its full potential.

-- Carlos Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*

### 3.1. Introduction

One finds in contemporary Western and Latin American political philosophy various powerful engagements with the idea of community. On the Western side, we can read the work of Maurice Blanchot, Antonio Negri, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others. On the Latin American side, we can read the work of José Carlos Mariátegui, Carlos Lenkersdorf, Orlando Fals Borda, Ernesto Laclau, Juan Carlos Scannone, Luis Britto García, Enrique Dussel, and others.<sup>59</sup> For the aims of this chapter, I will focus on the work of E. Dussel who has developed his concept of *people* on the communal basis presented in the previous chapter (chapter 2) on some Latin American Indigenous sense of community. The analysis of the Tojol ab'al, K'iche', and Andean Indigenous communities and the sense of communal 'we' developed by Carlos Lenkersdorf will permeate our insight and follow up Dussel's analysis on the concept of *people*. I will also present in this chapter Dussel's questioning of political system that seek to keep citizens politically silenced by not practicing political consensus. Dussel's analysis of this type of political system will be illuminated by the political Indigenous perspective since the concept of *people* is meant to be localized and analyzed in the light of Latin America, where the presence of many

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<sup>59</sup> I want to thank professors Frederick Mills and Gabriel Salazar for their contribution constructing the previous list.

Indigenous communities is influential and unquestionable.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, in order to express the importance of constructing a new political constitution based on the active participation of the members of the community, Dussel challenges the current political system that is taking for granted the influence of the indigenous traditions in the way politics can be practiced in Latin America.

Since for Dussel the community is synonym with power, the adoption of the Indigenous communal sense is key to understand Dussel's meaning of power (*potentia*) and political power (*potestas*). It is worth noting, the community does not depend on how many members it encompasses. That is, quantity is not essential for understanding what Dussel means by *people* but knowing what are the demands of the unified persons and the motif that keep them together working for the same aim.

The idea behind political power cannot be comprehended if we do not acknowledge along Dussel that reaching a communal agreement is characteristic among certain Indigenous communities. Dussel adopts the notion of consensus as the key piece for communal systems to practice their political power. Although the practice of consensus is hegemonic by nature, it forges more power to the community than the decision made by one person. In such a line of thought, to understand that *people* and power are two

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<sup>60</sup> The Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE, by its Spanish acronym) states that "Based on the census, the chapter reports on an indigenous population in the region close to 45 million people in 2010, with a high heterogeneity among countries: at one end is Mexico and Peru, where the indigenous population is almost 17 million and 7 million, respectively; and in the other, Costa Rica and Paraguay, where just over 100,000 indigenous people live in each case, as well as Uruguay, with almost 80,000. Currently, it is possible to count 826 indigenous peoples in the countries of the region, also with a very diverse panorama: at one end is Brazil, where there are 305 indigenous peoples, and then Colombia (102), Peru (85) and Mexico (78); and in the other, Costa Rica and Panama, each of which has 9 Indigenous villages and then El Salvador (3) and Uruguay (2)" (2014: 12). CEPAL, *Los pueblos indígenas en América Latina: Avances en el último decenio y retos pendientes para la garantía de sus derechos*, Naciones Unidas, Santiago, Chile, 2014. All translation is mine.

dimensions of the Indigenous life is to accept the mutual dependence between members of the community in political power.

The concept of *people* points toward the fact that we are dependent of others to survive. Then, individualism or any type of exclusion to the notion of 'we' in unity and correlation falls short to explain our necessity to interact with other human beings; the basis on which politics is and should always be founded, according to Dussel. Thus, Dussel's tendency to ensure the continuity and unity of our life with that of others points toward the obligation philosophers have for explaining reality from the simple to the complex; a scheme where material reality takes the lead.<sup>61</sup>

As Dussel appreciates it, in the absence of a political constitution where the *people* could enjoy the active participation lived as in the communal 'we,' it is fundamental to reveal the reason of the detrimental reality *people* are experiencing "to have their demands fulfilled."<sup>62</sup> Because of this, and the lack of trust and credibility to politicians, it has become increasingly common to witness social protests taking to the streets.<sup>63</sup> As it seems, the movements, groups, and sectors which organize themselves in social protests believe there is no other option available for them than demonstrating their frustration and urgency to be taken seriously in the political realm. The concept of *people*, as Dussel explains it,

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<sup>61</sup> By material reality Dussel means human's basic needs to survive: Water, food, shelter, land to cultivate and live on, and so on. The concept of *people* also will resemble the material reality since for Dussel the *people* seek the freedom of the oppressed groups through a process of liberation that always needs politics to flourish and become concrete.

<sup>62</sup> TTP, 71.

<sup>63</sup> In Anthony Giddens' (2000) words, "Nations have lost most of the sovereignty they once had, and politicians have lost most of their capacity to influence events. It isn't surprising that no one respects political leaders any more, or has much interest in what they have to say. The era of the nation-state is over" (p. 26). Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*, Routledge, New York, 2000.

takes meaning specially in the Latin American political system reality through the fact that *people's* “unsatisfied demands” creates “demand-based mobilizations” on their part.<sup>64</sup>

Another aspect of Dussel's concept of *people* I will be focused on in this chapter is the role of politicians in participating and collaborating closely with citizenry so that political power be understood as a collaborative work where political authorities are meant to command by obeying the community.<sup>65</sup> Whether political authorities hear the demands of the community or not will decide the progress and efficiency of politics. After all, citizens are taking more participation in political arena, and the corruption of government just calls the attention of the *people* to get more involved in society.

Finally, to understand the concept of people 1) we must not forget the communal sense of Indigenous peoples 2) without letting this prevent us from entering into an increasingly globalized reality where individuality and exclusionary competition is the order of the day. So, I will use the Indigenous communities as a counterargument against the growing universalization of non-communal values that are increasingly presented as the ideal of an interconnected world by technological advances in communication and transportation accepting a greater expansion of the so-called globalization.

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<sup>64</sup> TTP, 71.

<sup>65</sup> For more information on the notion of ‘command by obeying’ see section 2.6 of chapter 2 titled “Delegation of Political Power.”



### 3.2. An Imaginary Context<sup>66</sup>

In order to understand how the concept of *people* arises, let's read the following quote written by Enrique Dussel in the eleventh chapter of his book *Twenty Thesis on Politics*, titled "The *People*: The Popular Sector and "Populism"":

If all sectors of the political community were able to have their demands fulfilled, there would be no social protest or formation of popular movements struggling for the fulfillment of their unsatisfied demands. It is by starting from the *negativity* of needs – for some dimension of life, or for democratic participation – that the *struggle for recognition* is frequently transformed into demand-based mobilizations, which do not await justice as a gift of the powerful but rather seek it as an autonomous achievement of the movements. In this sense, there could exist as many movements as there are differential claims.<sup>67</sup>

Clearly, Dussel is not referring our attention here to the Indigenous socio-political system. On the other hand, he is exposing a context in which the citizens of a political community, are divided in different sectors depending on their differential claims. Usually, all these sectors, movements, groups, etc. fight for their own demands. In this communal live, political power belongs only to few members of the community called the internal government, which is constituted by the governor and representatives. Politically speaking, the community that the internal government manages or governs is not recognized as a political entity by itself. Thus, whether the community needs political attention or not it depends on their willing to organize social protests.

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<sup>66</sup> In this section, I will introduce an imaginary context. This serves as a contrast to the Tojolabal communal live. This imaginary context rises the opportunity to understand Dussel's quotes on the definition of people and its derivatives. Even though in his book *Twenty Thesis on Politics*, Dussel brings not an imaginary context, I think it will facilitate us a new type of antithesis we can use to compare the Tojolabal communal live and the non-Tojolabal communal live within which the people live in.

<sup>67</sup> TTP, 71.

As Dussel emphasizes, these protests are ‘demand-based mobilizations’ by which the community demands political attention from the internal government to fulfill some material needs (such as clean water, the opportunity to work their own lands, and so on). Whether due to some ‘willing to live’ or to achieve some communal participation, the community mobilizes itself as an entity with the aim of being heard by the internal government.

The reality is that if the needs of the members are particular and individual, no consensual agreement can be reached. However, the requests of this community are based on needs that everyone has as members of the same system. If the reality of the case is that the members of the community do not have common demands, but are fighting for particular needs, we should ask ourselves, together with Dussel, the following question:

How can these pass from being *a* particular claim to being a *hegemonic* claim able to unify all social movements in a country at a given moment? This is a question of moving from differential particularities to *a universal* one that encompasses them.<sup>68</sup>

In other words, if the particular needs of each member of the whole community divide it in different groups, how all these different groups or movements, following their own demands, can agree and aim to protest for a ‘universal’ or prioritized demand?<sup>69</sup> Dussel answers to this question by stating the following:

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<sup>68</sup> TTP, 72.

<sup>69</sup> For Dussel this question is central because for a communal system to work, the members should seek the same end. Reaching a communal agreement is fundamental to the survival of the community because it ensures that the demands of its members are not divided when it comes to presenting them to the internal government. In an indigenous communal context, if the members of the community do not reach a consensual agreement, the internal government will not be able to ‘command by obeying’ since it will only attend to the needs of some but not of others.

The community, as linguistic and communicative, is one in which its members can provide reasons to other members in order to arrive at agreements. Through the use of a wide range of arguments that represent public rhetorical expressions in reference to the community of wills (e.g., mythical stories, artistic expressions like theater, or even the most abstract scientific formulations), *consensus* can be reached provided that citizens participate symmetrically. Such consensuses – which are occasionally unintentional but accepted by tradition, and as such are no less valid – result in a convergence of wills toward a common good, and this is what we can properly term “political power”.<sup>70</sup>

The differential claims of the groups might be sacrificed to prioritize some demands over others and to protests for a universal and all-encompassing demand. Regardless of how many groups, sectors, or movements are involucrate in community’s protests, each group should set aside its own particular ideologies to prioritize the demands required by the whole community so that the protest can be effective. It does not matter if they once were feminists, anti-racists, LGBTQ+ members, Indigenous communities, unemployed people, environmentalists, or any movement claiming its ‘unsatisfied demands’ and struggling for some political recognition,’ the priorities of the whole community should unite each of the separate groups by wisely naming the basic needs that allow not only survival, but the preservation of all life of which the human being is a partaker. When such a context becomes possible and real, the community puts into practice the Indigenous sense of correspondence and communal ‘we.’

As Dussel himself states, the success of the unity of these distinct movements were produced by two major factors: 1) the ideas of dialogue and translation; brought by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and 2) the notion of the prioritization of demands; brought by

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<sup>70</sup> TTP, 14-15.

Ernesto Laclau.<sup>71</sup> On the one hand, for the Portuguese sociologists Boaventura de Sousa Santos the demands of different movements and sectors of the political community “must enter into a process of dialogue and *translation*, with the goal of achieving an understanding between movements that nonetheless never represents an encompassing universal.”<sup>72</sup> Discussing and translating the objectives of each group and reforming them to make them shareable is to produce the unity of ‘the different movements and sectors of the political community.’ On the other hand, for the Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau, dialoguing and translating the aims and agree on their unity is not enough. According to Laclau, this could create a group conflict if the movements do not reach agreement to prioritize some demands over others. Since such clarification explains the success of the unity of these distinct members with particular demands, and is totally consistent with the idea of dialogue and translation provided by the Portuguese sociologist, Dussel embraces the theory that the unity of different sectors occurs when all the demands are encompassed, giving priority to some of them over others.

### **3.3. The Hegemonic Demand and the Rise of the *People***

The result of the collaboration of these two proposals made by de Sousa Santos and Laclau is what Dussel calls the ‘analogic hegemon.’<sup>73</sup> As Dussel states, “through mutual information, dialogue, translation of proposals, and shared militant praxis, these movements slowly and progressively constitute an *analogical hegemon*, which to some

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<sup>71</sup> TTP, 72.

<sup>72</sup> TTP, 72.

<sup>73</sup> TTP, 72.

degree includes all demands but might [...] prioritize some.”<sup>74</sup> The analogic hegemon is hegemonic, since it must be “based on the consensus of the determinant majority.”<sup>75</sup> This unity of movements, as Dussel writes, “construct a “bloc” that comes “from below” with an increasingly developed national and popular consciousness of the unfulfilled needs and claims that are assumed with a clear understanding of the demands they entail.”<sup>76</sup> To assume the ‘analogic hegemon’ is to accept the hegemonical relationship between these movements, sectors, and classes produced by the consensus of the majority.<sup>77</sup>

In Dussel words,

A hegemonic demand (or a coherently structure group of demands) is one that manages to unify all claims - or at least those most urgent for everyone - within a broader proposal. Struggles over demands constitute political actions, and if these actions achieve the level of unity, we can say that they become hegemonic. This does not mean that there are no antagonistic groups opposing minorities whose claims will need to be dealt with in the future. The fact is that political action needs to be extremely attentive in observing, respecting, and including, if possible, the interests of all groups, sectors, and movements. When an action becomes hegemonic, it begins to mobilize the power of the community or the *people* (as *potentia*), and the actions of representatives flow toward their objective with the support of the strength and motivation of all, or at least the most significant sectors. Hegemonic action is the fully

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<sup>74</sup> TTP, 72.

<sup>75</sup> TTP, 39.

<sup>76</sup> TTP, 73.

<sup>77</sup> Dussel knows that the process of consensus is a hegemonic practice, that is to say, it presupposes a relationship of differences where the strongest wins. However, when it comes to prioritizing one demand over another, as practiced by the Tojolabal community, for example, the members of the community talk and propose certain proposals to try to convince their peers that their proposal is fundamental and more relevant to all. Once the members are convinced that some are right about others, the people stop forcing their arguments. Finally, the proposal that convinces everyone will be accepted unanimously. This process involves strength but above all wisdom and humility to recognize that there are proposals that are better than others. See Carlos Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, Miguel Ángel Porrúa, México, 2005.

delegated exercise of power (*potestas*), and it relies on consensus, fraternity, and the *people* as the foundation of power.<sup>78</sup>

By giving priority to some demands over others emerges what Dussel categorizes as the *people*. That is, different groups affected in one way or another by the corrupt exercise of politics through political authorities come together by a single cause. Examples abound of the presence of the *people* in Latin American history. For instance, it was present and operating “[i]n the process of emancipation from Spain in 1810.”<sup>79</sup> Also, throughout our contemporary history it operates in certain political struggles.<sup>80</sup> For Dussel, we must take account of its existence and recognize its philosophical importance to constructing philosophical-political theory. In Dussel’s words,

In the process of creating a hegemonic bloc, the need arises for a category that can encompass the unity of all the movements, classes, sectors, etc. in political struggle. And so the *people* is that strictly political category (since it is not properly sociological or economic) that appears as absolutely essential, despite its ambiguity (and indeed this ambiguity does not result from misunderstanding but rather from inevitable complexity).<sup>81</sup>

In this way, the *people* become the philosophical concept capable of categorizing the encompassing of all the movements present in the social protests of the disadvantaged. This concept not only takes the form of the courage that the less advantaged give to stand up against the system that oppresses them, but it also carries with it the organization of a whole host of groups that disengage themselves from any identity that might divide them in

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<sup>78</sup> TTP, 39-40.

<sup>79</sup> TTP, 73.

<sup>80</sup> In the fourth chapter of this thesis project I will introduce the case of Puerto Rico.

<sup>81</sup> TTP, 73.

order to put into practice the hegemonic demand. The process that takes place when groups divided by different demands unite to fight for a common cause is the living example that a process of union in survival and desire to live is reflected as long as we all remember that we are first and foremost human beings, participants in all of life.

Unfortunately, the *people* are revolting against a system that does not take them into consideration. A political system that has benefited from the lack of participation of the entire community. In this way, the political authorities try to govern the community as long as the community does not demand that they obey it in everything it asks of them. In other words, to Indigenous command by obeying is not at the heart of the political system that the *people* are facing.<sup>82</sup>

### **3.4. The Concept of *People* in the Midst of Globalization**

In view of the lack of attention that the *people* have, the solution could be that the political authorities listen to their citizens. In this way, the protests carried out by the *people* will come to an end. However, some may be thinking that the fact that political authorities listen to the *people* will not prevent the demands of a few from being unsatisfied or that by ‘satiating’ the current needs of the *people* they will not have new desires in the future. What if instead of looking for less corruption and access to land and clean water, that is, demands

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<sup>82</sup> As Dussel himself writes, “‘Command obeying’ is an indigenous phrase popularized by the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico” (TTP, 19). It is practiced by listening “to the one before you” (TTP, 26). Nevertheless, the *people*, although sovereign to politically administer themselves in consensus, are obliged to manifest themselves in social protests demanding the fulfillment of their unfulfilled demands since the political representatives or governor within the political reality they are living in do not practice the obediential power. As it was concluded by Dussel, “*Obediential power* would therefore mean the delegated exercise of the power of all authority that fulfills the political justice claim. Put differently, this characterizes the upright political actor who aspires to exercise power in order to have the necessary subjective position to struggle in favor of the empirically possible happiness of a political community, a *people*” (TTP, 26).

for survival, now different groups come together to look for a more interconnected and economically efficient system like the one proposed by globalization?

As Gerónimo Romero Huayna states in his book *La globalización: Una plataforma de exclusión de los pueblos indígenas*, "[g]lobalization, understood as economic, cultural, social and political homogenization, promotes and generates universal values and rights and does not respond to the demands of the world's indigenous movements."<sup>83</sup> However, we should not succumb to temptation of demonizing globalization. It is true that globalization as a complex system has not responded to all the claims Indigenous communities have. That "[g]lobalization, understood as the capitalist commodification in a worldwide dimension, homogenizes everything in accordance with the interests of transnationals and imperialist powers; it is exclusive and will deepen the process of exclusion and denial of Indigenous People."<sup>84</sup> However, as Romero Huayna himself states,

In the new global context, there is a favorable international scenario for Indigenous Peoples, which creates conditions for the development of international public law, which allows dialogue and generates proposals in terms of the rights of Indigenous Peoples before governments and heads of state.<sup>85</sup>

If we can identify the *people* in struggles to defend the Indigenous communities and their lands against exclusionary capitalist and globalizing visions that ignore the Indigenous cosmovision, we must also understand that among globalization (as a complex system)

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<sup>83</sup>Gerónimo Romero Huayna, *La globalización: Una plataforma de exclusión de los pueblos indígenas*, Fondo para el desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas de América latina y el Caribe, La Paz, Bolivia: 2007. Hereafter cited as "LG" followed by page number. All translations are mine. LG, 62.

<sup>84</sup> LG, 215.

<sup>85</sup> LG, 214.



there has not yet been an effective dialogue that obeys the demands of the Indigenous. For this reason, the struggle of the *people* in favor of Indigenous communities can be understood as a search for dialogue in which the ignorance of transnationals and imperialist powers should be confronted and interpellated by the call of the Indigenous and less favored peoples.

Moreover, according to Dussel's theory of the people, we will not find the *people* fighting only for the interests of a few. For Dussel there is no such thing as a *people* who seeks things that will not favor those most affected since the *people* is the 'social bloc of the oppressed.'<sup>86</sup> In other words, the *people* are a community of oppressed individuals who respond to the needs of the less fortunate. Thus, although globalization as a model has focused on the claims of capitalist powers, it could collaborate with Indigenous communities and being favorable to the demands of the less advantageous. As Romero Huayna states,

Indigenous Peoples fight for the respect of the land, conservation of the environment, practice of cosmovision and religiosity with the *Pachamama*, they fight for the application of ancestral rights to the human person and the new concepts of interrelations of the social and the political have given them sufficient reasons to organize and wake up in the globalized world, which nevertheless gives a renewed space to the claims of Indigenous Peoples in different dimensions.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, we must understand that although the demands of the *people* can evolve and become more and more complex, the *people* will always emerge as a social bloc or

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<sup>86</sup> For more information on the *people* as the 'social bloc of the oppressed' see chapter 4 of this thesis project, section 4.1. "The People as Social Bloc."

<sup>87</sup> LG, 62.

community that will meet the needs of the less advantaged. Then, the problem is that as long as the *people* are not heard and the separation between the *people* and the political, economic, and social authorities persists, the *people* will remain oppressed.

### 3.5. The Oblivion of the ‘We’: The Origin of the Scission of Political Power

For Enrique Dussel, “[t]he *pueblo* [people] establishes an internal frontier or a fracture within the political reality.”<sup>88</sup> That is, the *people* are distinguished from the political system and separated from the political activity and, at the same time, are the ‘fracture within the political reality’ since they do not follow the political ordering of the system. Nevertheless, before this situation, the *people* behave in an interesting manner; they act akin to the Indigenous communal sense. The problem is that the Tojol ab’al ‘we,’ for instance, is unrecognized by the political system taking political authority as a task of few members. In such a context, the socio-political participation of the *tojolabales* in the communal ‘we’ is unrecognized. The idea of a political system where political authorities command by obeying the community does not fit in. For this reason, if we make a comparison between the political system from where the *people* arise as a social bloc of the oppressed with the Tojol ab’al community, we will conclude that the *people* demand from their system what is not in its political constitution; thus, the *people* are mere citizens protesting. That is, the system from where the *people* come possesses a political participation that is limited to vote during the elections, always waiting four years to feel that they are actively participating in politics – a responsibility delegated to the elected government. This produces an ‘internal

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<sup>88</sup> TTP, 74; [my emphasis].

frontier' between the accountability of political authorities and the community. For this reason, the *people* are considered outsiders in this political system.

Given this situation, the political system becomes a non-hierarchical system where a constitution that allows the participation of the community in the decision-making process as the members of the Tojol ab'al community practices does not exist. The political system in where the *people* show up does not expect from their citizens and internal government to decide together as a 'we.' Communal consent is not fundamental for this political system where the *people* is not considered the power of political power. In this way the organization of the political system is conducive to the emergence of the *people*, to rise up as a powerful community, capable of surviving as a bloc with the purpose of its voice being heard, assumed and integrated. If this happens, the political system will be closer to the ideal of a community of the 'we.'<sup>89</sup>

### **3.6. The Power of the *People*: From *Potentia* to *Potestas***

Since the Indigenous socio-political system puts the community at the center of its organization, for Dussel, politics is forged by the desire and choice to survive as bloc or community. This desire (*potentia*) to survive or exist as a community becomes the origin of power who makes politics possible. *Potentia* as power is the first manifestation of the capacity or potential the community possesses to govern and practice its emancipation from

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<sup>89</sup> I make my own the words of Alejandra Aquino Moreschi (2013) when she states that the ideal of communal everyday life is not always expressed as a perfect reality. According to her, "Communality is expressed differently in each community context, its particularities depending on historical, social, political and cultural factors specific to each context. Hence, in real life, communality manifests itself in multiple ways, sometimes closer and sometimes farther from the ideal model" (2013: 12) Alejandra Aquino Moreschi, "La comunalidad como epistemología del Sur. Aportes y retos," *Cuadernos del Sur, Revista de ciencias sociales*, Año 18, Num. 34, pp. 7-19, enero-junio 2013. Hereafter cited as "LCES" followed by page number. All translations are mine.

systems that tend to exclude.<sup>90</sup> In this way, the *people* as a communality represent the *potentia* to exercise political emancipation. In Dussel words:

I will use therefore the term *potentia* to refer to the power that is a faculty or capacity inherent in the *people* as the final instance of sovereignty, authority, governability, and the political. This power as *potentia* – which spreads like a network over the entire political field, and within which every political actor is a node [...] – develops on various levels and in various spheres, thereby constituting the foundation and essence of *all that is political*. One might even say that the political is the *development* of political power in all its moments.<sup>91</sup>

In this manner, *potentia* is the potential of a community, sector, social bloc, and each group to become a political actor. However, this capacity might become active and operating in order to exercise its political power. In this way, we could say that the Indigenous communities are an excellent example of what it means to be *potentia*. Indigenous are trying to survive as a whole. To achieve their goal they not only show their capacity to live in community but also to translate their desire to live in a political system where life takes precedence. Because for Dussel “politics is an activity that organizes and promotes the production, reproduction, and enhancement of the lives of the members of that community,”<sup>92</sup> the Indigenous communities, with their lifestyle and organizational system, present a model of what political ideal is.

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<sup>90</sup> As Alejandra Aquino Moreschi states, “The community is an emancipatory thought and practice” (LCES, 12). It is an emancipatory thought to the extent that it reflects along with others and an emancipatory practice since it presents the necessary tools and practical means to exercise resistance and community mobilizations.

<sup>91</sup> TTP, 17; My emphasis.

<sup>92</sup> TTP, 14.

Dussel highlights that by nature humanity is essentially a social being that needs each other to be born and grow. In fact, we need each other to survive and occupy a place in the political society. In this manner, *potentia*, which is the ‘foundation and essence of all that is political,’ based in this social relation and interaction with others and prioritizing the demands that ensure life in all its forms becomes operative and active. And when *potentia* operates actively, it is transformed into *potestas*, that is, active political power:

If *potentia* is power *in-itself*, then *potestas* is power *outside-itself* [...]. The process of passing from a fundamental moment (*potentia*) to its constitution as an organized power (*potestas*) begins when the political community affirms itself as an instituting power [...], thereby deciding to heterogeneously organize its functions in order to accomplish diverse ends.<sup>93</sup>

Following what Dussel states here, there is a necessity to move forward from *potentia* to *potestas* when the *people* bring to concretion the ‘organized power’ operating in political reality to accomplish their goal.<sup>94</sup> Further still, Dussel states that the institutionalization of the power is fundamental in order to allow the political power to concretely appear in socio-political reality. It could be said that this process occurs almost naturally in the Indigenous communities when they develop around a system where everyone is supported and corresponds to the communal needs. However, in the case of the *people*, the transition from having the capacity (*potentia*) to have a political impact to having it (*potestas*) takes

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<sup>93</sup> TTP, 19; My emphasis.

<sup>94</sup> According to Enrique Dussel, politics, when institutionalized (*potestas*), ensures and makes real community’s will-to-live (*potentia*). For better or worse, *potestas* can become a self-interested or egoistic power to dominate the community and maintain power over it. However, the continuous participation of the community and that it works hand in hand with its political leaders avoids that political powers are used for the benefit of only a few and therefore, that politics is corrupted, fetishized and monopolized.

time and depends on whether there is a collective agreement on the issue that everyone wants to address, resolve or cover.<sup>95</sup>

It is worth clarifying that it is not enough for the power of the *people* to be institutionalized. For it to work, it must be practiced in the community, since this has been its main driving force. In addition, the desire to achieve unity and protest as a social bloc must keep the members alive and active. In this way, when the unity of the members of a social bloc demonstrates a relationship of unity comparable to the Indigenous communal sense and takes action either in the streets, in the plazas, or in a public space to demand dialogue, attentive, and committed listening to the political authorities, then we can affirm that it has passed from *potentia* to *potestas*.

### 3.7. Conclusion

To avoid political impotence is to prevent the political scission caused by the separation of the *people* from their political power. Because the community and the internal government have equal political authority in the Indigenous communities are discussing in this thesis project, there is no other ideal as the one proposing the internal government making political decisions with the consent of the whole community. The Indigenous communities considers how fundamental is the participation of its members and know the benefits of hearing and sharing personal impression in communal meetings.<sup>96</sup> Through this

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<sup>95</sup> On the transition from *potentia* to *potestas* Dussel states that “The institutionalized community is one that, having created the mediations that make possible the exercise of *potestas*, splits off from the merely undifferentiated community. This is a scission between *potentia* and *potestas*, in other words, between the power of the political community as central, original, and fundamental (the hidden ontological level) and the heterogeneous differentiation of functions through institutions that allow power to become real, empirical, and feasible, which allow it to appear (as phenomenon) in the political field” (TTP, 20).

<sup>96</sup> FCT, 39.

political participation, a decision made by the whole community is achieved and the community exercises its political power moving from *potentia* to *potestas*.

In the imaginary context that we discussed in this chapter, we were able to confront a political system where not only do the inhabitants have no participation, but they have experienced political power as something that belongs to the rulers/political authorities. Thus, if community members wanted to participate, they had to organize social protests so that the government would listen to them. At that time, the political participation of the citizens was an exceptional state to the one the political system was used to, since there was a quasi-permanent split or scission between the community and the internal government. Hence, as the different movements, sectors, classes, etc. unified their voices to fight for a priority demand, they acted as a Tojol ab'al 'we' in the midst of a system/reality where the sense of Indigenous community is not the norm.

This is how the people emerged: a social bloc of oppressed people who wanted to rise up so that they would no longer be trampled on by the ignorance of the government system. This social bloc behaves as a community where the demands of the participants must be translated, and agreement reached on which needs are a priority. Usually the needs that have the highest priority are those that have to do with the preservation of life in all its forms. However, as we saw, the community may want to be part of a globalized system, for instance, to have greater political reach, benefit from and participate in technological advances, and be taken into consideration in the midst of global scales that usually ignore the voice of the worse affected (i.e. Indigenous communities). The idea, therefore, is not that the demands of the people be kept in having clean water, land to harvest and live on, etc. but that they can become demands that involve political participation in global

economy where the interconnectivity of the global system is enriched by different worldviews. The task of the *people* will always be to raise the voice of the less fortunate.

In the next chapter we will follow Dussel's analysis of the concept of *people* and how it becomes the 'Other' of a closed system in corrupting politicians who have appropriated the political power to use it for their own benefit. Presenting the *people* as the 'Other' will allow us to understand the urgency of practicing the "obediential power." We will also be able to understand how using political power as a quality belonging only to the political authorities corrupts the system and prevents the *people* from being able to stop being the social bloc of the oppressed.



## Chapter 4. The Origin of the *People* as the Other than Political Power

The question of whether or not it is possible to “change the world without taking power” has from the outset been posed incorrectly. *Power* is not “taken” as though it were a thing, an object at hand, or a well-bound package. Power is a faculty belonging to the political community, to the *people*. The power that *appears* to be “taken” is merely the mediations or institutions of the delegated exercise of this fundamental power.

-- Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*

### 4.1. Introduction

In the following chapter we will study the arise of the *people* as the wake-up call or warning signal given to the internal government. The *people* will always emerge as a product of the fetishization, corruption, and monopolization of political affairs and when the community has not political participation. Hence, to understand what the *people* are, we must first understand why the corruption or fetishization of political power creates the ideal environment for the uprising of the people – the social bloc of the oppressed.<sup>97</sup> For instance, the action of ‘taking’ political power as an instrument or means to order the community represents by itself the scission between the political community and the internal government because political power ‘is a faculty belonging to the political community.’ That is, political power is not a ‘thing’ we should take but the community as a political actor and therefore, as an end.

Because fetishization and reification of political power produces or originates the scission between the community and the internal government, the community ought to participate always in the institutionalization of political power and be obeyed by the

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<sup>97</sup> For Dussel, a fetishized political power exists when political representation has been ‘taken’ by the internal government (e.g. presidents, governors, representatives, legislatures, etc.) as an instrument to govern the community and exercise political power without the participation of the community.

internal government whose main duty is to observe the demands of the community and ensure its participation. When political power is not fetishized a) the community does not become the *people* and b) ‘obediential power’ (command obeying the community) becomes a possibility. In light of the above, it should be clarified that according to Dussel, the community has the vocation of politics. If this vocation is suppressed by a corrupt political system, the most affected groups will rise up against the system. In other words, the people are the negatively affected community who rise up against the corrupt political system to achieve a new system. Hence, the *people* are the ‘Other’ of an enclosed and Totalized system.<sup>98</sup> However, that the *people* are oppressed and excluded does not mean that they do not constitute or forge power. *People’s* will to survive ends with fetishist *potestas* demanding a ‘new system’ that is always made possible after what Dussel calls ‘the state of rebellion,’ by which the ruling or prevailing system is overthrown.

#### 4.2. The *People* as Social Bloc

According to Enrique Dussel, the *people* are a ‘social bloc’<sup>99</sup> that behaves as a ‘whole’ and a ‘collective actor.’<sup>100</sup> Hence, they are a whole because they “can be both integrated and disintegrated.”<sup>101</sup> That is, the *people* are integrated because they arise at a certain point (when the community becomes exterior to the political system, and is then, despised and oppressed by it) and disintegrated since they end to exist when the corrupted system is

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<sup>98</sup> It is worth clarifying that although Dussel takes the idea of ‘otherness’ or the ‘Other’ from the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, when talking about the *people* Dussel makes his own the concept of the Other. In this way, the philosophical connotations that the concept of the Other will have in Dussel’s philosophy will be different or will take on a particular meaning to those proposed by Levinas.

<sup>99</sup> TTP, 75.

<sup>100</sup> See, TTP, 21, 80, and 82.

<sup>101</sup> TTP, 75.

overthrown and command by obeying is put into practice. On the other hand, the *people* are a ‘collective actor’ since, by acting as a community of the ‘we,’ they maintain an organizational coherence that allows them to behave as an actor or unified whole. This happens since humans need others to survive and preserve life.

In terms of the communal sense, Dussel emphasizes that “since human communities have always been threatened by their vulnerability to death and to extinction, such communities maintain an instinctive desire to remain alive.”<sup>102</sup> And indeed, it is the community’s desire to survive that shapes the will-to-live of the *people*. In Dussel words, “[t]his *desire-to-live* of human beings in a community can be called *will*. The *will-to-live* is the originary tendency of all human beings.”<sup>103</sup> It is this same desire to survive that motivates the *people* to fight despite being excluded by the system in which they find themselves.<sup>104</sup> However, because they are repressed to exercise their vocation and political faculty amidst a corrupted political system, the *people* are ‘victims.’ Dussel writes, “[t]he victims of the prevailing political system *cannot live* fully (this is why they are victims). Their *Will-to-Live* has been negated by the *Will-to-Power* of the powerful.”<sup>105</sup> The *people*, hence, are outside of the political realm since they cannot exercise their political faculty; it was usurped by the corrupted internal government and the creation of the corrupted,

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<sup>102</sup> TTP, 13.

<sup>103</sup> TTP, 13.

<sup>104</sup> When the *people* resist the risk of death, they get engaged in social protests, entering political society as a collective actor by unifying different sectors, movements, and classes to work together along with other victims whose demands are unfulfilled. By doing so, the *people* resemble the Indigenous communal sense.

<sup>105</sup> TTP, 78.

monopolized, and fetishized *potestas*.<sup>106</sup> In such a context, political power is ‘owned’ by the corrupted internal government.

### 4.3. The *People* as the Other of the Corrupted System

Based on the community’s will-to-live, singular subjects forge their demands into what becomes the community. Within the framework of the corrupted political system, the will-to-live becomes the force by which the *people* constitute an ‘internal frontier or a fracture within the political reality.’ In Dussel’s words, “The first determination of power (as *potentia*) is will, and this is what the *people* recover in conjunctural moments of great transformation.”<sup>107</sup> At this point *people* serve as the demarcating frontier of the political system; a frontier or fracture within the political reality revealing itself as the ‘Other’ of the Totality of the system. For this reason, Dussel writes,

The political system, the existing order, finally closes in on itself as a Totality. Emmanuel Levinas, in his work *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, describes this process of the totalitarian totalization of the Totality “as the exclusion of the Other”, which Marx completes by adding those oppressed by the system. The *people* therefore maintain a complex position. On the one hand, they are the social bloc “of the oppressed” within the system (for example, the working class), but they simultaneously comprise the excluded (for example, the marginalized, the indigenous peoples who survive through self-sufficient production and consumption, etc.).<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Fortunately, *people’s* will-to-live is the only power (*potentia*) that a fetishized *potestas* cannot surmount. *Potentia* allows the community to overcome death as a collective. This situation follows with what Dussel addressed earlier. He said that the *people* are power (*potentia*) since they have the capacity to preserve life. Comparing the victims of the prevailing system with the Tojol ab’al socio-political system, the latter survive since it favors the participation of the whole community. That is, the Tojol ab’al community is neither enclosed nor enslaved in itself by corrupted rules and institutions (*potestas*) that do not favor the well-being of the entire community. On the other hand, the *people* have no participation in the system they found themselves, thus, are excluded and ignored by the socio-political system.

<sup>107</sup> TTP, 78.

<sup>108</sup> TTP, 78.

As a social bloc of the oppressed, the *people* are within the system, working for the system from below. However, they also are the excluded social bloc since they have no part in political actions. For this reason, the *people* long for a new system, one in which they exercise their political faculty and are obeyed by political authorities.<sup>109</sup>

Hence, the *people* are the Other. According to Emmanuel Levinas, the Other is the ‘other than Totality.’ The Totality as a whole, as an encompassed multiplicity of individual pieces, does not need anything that remains outside of it. In order to be aware of what is outside, it must open itself up to the ‘new,’ to the ‘different.’ And it is outside the totality that the Other is found. In *Totality and Infinity: An Essay of Exteriority*, Totality has the characteristic of being a whole enclosed in the same.<sup>110</sup> Hence, Totality is the same, while the Other is the different. Totality, by encompassing what is the same, excludes. That is, because Totality represents sameness or totalization, it is finished, terminated, and closed to the different Other.

Dussel uses this analogy of the Totality and the Other to explain what happens in a fetishized and corrupted political system. And since Dussel understands that Levinas’ concept of the Other is an equivocal concept, that is, that it has two or more possible

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<sup>109</sup> Once fetishized power becomes a barrier to the community, the internal government acquires power to enforce itself. The community, which is political power (*potentia*), turns out (paradoxically) to be separated from its power in the establishment of a corrupted *potestas*. Oppression (of the community) is the production of a scission between the community and its political power. On such a model, the idea of command by obeying becomes sterile since it is an ideal of political power exercised within *potentia* (prior to the scission) but impossible under a corrupted, monopolized, or fetishized *potestas*.

<sup>110</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Duquense University Press, Pennsylvania: 1969. P. 170.

meanings, he dares to elaborate a theory of the *people* in which it is the excluded and oppressed Other.<sup>111</sup>

Basically the process of liberating the *people* as the Other will work as long as the political authorities, inscribed in a Totalitarian and closed system of corrupt politics, assume responsibility for-the-other, the excluded, the oppressed, the least listened to. According to the philosopher François Raffoul, writing on Levinas' notion of responsibility towards the Other in the fifth chapter of his book *The Origin of Responsibility* titled "Levinas's Reversal of Responsibility,"

One finds in Levinas's thinking of responsibility a sustained attempt to overcome the very horizon of egology. Indeed, far from assigning responsibility to the actions of an agent on the basis of the freedom of the subject, following an entire tradition, Levinas breaks with such a horizon [...] and re-conceptualizes responsibility as a being "for-the-other".<sup>112</sup>

Responsibility is for the Other, as exterior to me. This notion of responsibility, whose main purpose is 'for-the-other', overcomes any attempt to perpetuate egology. How so? The Other is a mystery inasmuch as I recognize myself unable to understand the dreams,

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<sup>111</sup> In the second volume of his book *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana*, entitled "Ética y moralidad," Enrique Dussel assumes the duty of developing the bases of an ethics of metaphysics or alterity capable of presenting the task of Latin American philosophy. Already in the last and sixth chapter, entitled "El método de la ética", Dussel expresses that his philosophical position with respect to the Other was inspired by the thought of Lévinas. However, Lévinas could not overcome the European context of his philosophizing since for him "the Other is 'absolutely' another. He therefore tended to be mistaken. On the other hand, he has never thought that the Other could be an Indian, an African, an Asian" (Dussel, 1973: 161). Interpreting the Other beyond Lévinas, Dussel affirms that the "Other, for us, is Latin America with respect to the European Totality; it is the poor and oppressed Latin American people with respect to the dominant and nevertheless dependent oligarchies" (1973: 161). This second volume will conclude with the presentation of a morality of liberation and the methods to be employed in the ethics of liberation, which will lay the foundations that the Latin American philosopher of liberation will have to assume, if his/her philosophical project is in favor of the poor, miserable and forgotten Other. Enrique Dussel, *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana Tomo II*, Siglo XXI Argentina Editores S. A., Córdoba, Buenos Aires, 1973.

<sup>112</sup> François Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2010. P. 163.

desires, hopes of the Other, until he/she opens him/herself to me by speaking or interacting with me. On such a model, the 'I' is defined by its relationship with the Other. In fact, Levinas is not arguing that the 'I' has no relevance in the 'I-You (Other)' relation,' but that through responsibility the 'I' cannot be defined by itself but by the Other who questions, interrogates, and demands from the 'I' attention; responsibility.<sup>113</sup>

This responsibility for-the-other takes on certain nuances in the indigenous communal sense. For instance, in his book *Philosophizing in Tojolabal Code (Filosofar en clave tojolabal)*, Carlos Lenkersdorf states that the 'I' and the 'Other' only exist because of the 'we.'<sup>114</sup> This occurs in such a way that for the community as a whole, it does not take precedence to speak of a relationship between 'me' and 'you,' but rather of an interconnected relationship that is reciprocated by the 'we.' Lenkersdorf himself describes it as follows: "The predominance of the 'we' excludes, in our opinion, the preponderance of the individual, regardless of whether it is I, YOU, HE, OR SHE."<sup>115</sup> The primacy of the 'we,' therefore, involves the subjective individual self, in a communal relationship that

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<sup>113</sup> Following Levinas's idea of responsibility in *Ethics and Infinity*, responsibility 'for-the-other' is defined "as responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me." (1985: 95). The radicality of this manner of understanding responsibility lies in on the basis of accepting the Other from his/her exteriority. Even when his/her presence bothers me, I have an ethical responsibility towards him/her. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Conversation with Philippe Nemo. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Duquesne University Press, 1985.

<sup>114</sup> FCT, 34.

<sup>115</sup> FCT, 33.

surpasses any possible closed loop present in the I-YOU relationship.<sup>116</sup> For this reason, Lenkersdorf concludes that the “I-You [...] does not equate to the WE.”<sup>117</sup>

#### 4.4. From Fetishized Power to *People’s* Advent: The Origin of the New System

In *Latin American Ethical Philosophy: From Erotic to Pedagogical (Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana: De la Erótica a la Pedagógica)*, Enrique Dussel highlights the (paradoxical) relation between the *people* and the oppressed of the system. The *people*, as the oppressed of the prevailing system, represent the ‘new system.’ Because they are not tied to the old system (then, freed from political corruption) and are longing, desiring, hoping, and projecting (*proyectando*) the future, the *people* embody what the new is.<sup>118</sup> In Dussel words,

The dominator tends to dominate the system, the totality which is the fruit of a process of anterior liberation that has led him/her to the power [*que lo ha llevado al poder*]. For this reason, the one who dominates cannot but think that the better time is the past: all past was better, and all future is risky to his/her power, domination. Through the entire human history, always [*desde siempre*], future belongs to the oppressed, because he/she is exterior to the system; because he/she is the one who has nothing to lose; because he/she simply has nothing [*porque simplemente no tiene nada*].<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> As it seems, the ‘we’ disappears the ‘I-You’ relation by conforming a structure where everyone understands itself in and for the ‘we.’ I argue that even though the new responsibility that Levinas introduces to Western thinking overcomes the prevailing ‘egology’ of Western philosophical and ethical tradition and serves as an analogy or example of how to end the supremacy of the ‘I’ over the (oppressed) Other, the Tojol ab’al ‘we,’ and Dussel’s concept of *people*, should not be understood from a Western standpoint where the ‘I’ preserves its validity over the ‘we.’ On such a model, Enrique Dussel interprets the concept of the Other in new ways and possibility that fit with the Latin American reality. In this manner, also, I argue that the concept of *people* presents a new alternative to the ‘I-You’ and ‘for-the-other’ relationships in order to develop a socio-political system where the Other possesses characteristics typical of Latin America.

<sup>117</sup> FCT, 33.

<sup>118</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana 6/III: De la Erótica a la Pedagógica*. Editorial EDICOL/MEXICO, 1977. My translation. Henceforth cited as “FEL.” FEL, 214.

<sup>119</sup> FEL, 214. [My emphasis].



As Dussel emphasizes, the *people*, coming from below, have nothing to lose looking for a better future. The future belongs to them since they constitute a temporal dimension of the possibility that only those who have nothing perceive. The *people* may say: “It might not work. But it may be worth trying before losing even the only thing that remains, that is, hope!” In the quest for the new system, the *people* overcome the old system, closed upon itself in the past. And even when the new system is impossible until it shows up, the *people* have no system since they are excluded from the prevailing one. The *people* have nothing to lose trying to overcome the corrupted system. On such a model, the future looks as the only thing the *people* have.

The new beginning the *people* are striving for questions the vain hope of the powerful to perpetuate the old system, the fetishized one. However, the *people* are always ready and prepared to create a new system since they were suffering the consequences of corruption. Thus, the *people* imagine a new possible system while they inhabit on the outskirts of the current one. As Dussel writes, the capacity to imagine a new system makes of the *people* a futural community: “The people are *outside* the system at a certain level, and, because they are *outside* the system, they are in the future.”<sup>120</sup> That is, the *people* are not tied to the prevailing system, they are in the future, in the possibility, in the coming of ‘something different’ and ‘new.’<sup>121</sup> The *people*, as the excluded and oppressed, are futural

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<sup>120</sup> FEL, 215.

<sup>121</sup> Dussel compares the *people* with a kid because they are the “source of the future, of the re-newal [renovación], of the dis-tinct life [vida dis-tinta], of the family and political ad-venture [ad-ventura familiar y política] (FEL, 156; [my emphasis]).

because in their hope for a better system they break up the prevailing one, demanding a novel one; a ground-breaking one.<sup>122</sup>

When the political system fetishizes *potestas*, *people's* advent or rise becomes inevitable. Dussel affirms that, on such a context, the power of the whole political community is the *people*.<sup>123</sup> As the *people* represents the 'we' in a non-Indigenous socio-political structure, they cannot rely on the internal government. On the contrary, it is up to them whether a new system is possible. As Dussel states,

If *potentia* is a capacity belonging to the political community, which now in a position of dominance has organized *potestas* in favor of its interests and against the emergent *people*, then *hyperpotentia* is the power of the *people*, its sovereignty and authority [...] that emerges in creative moments of history to inaugurate great transformations or radical revolutions.<sup>124</sup>

The *people*, as futural, have the power to 'inaugurate great transformations and radical revolutions' by themselves. That is, the *people* confront the manner in which the current fetishized political system understands power as something manipulable or that can be taken. Hence, *people's* will-to-live is revealed as the "anti-power in the face of the power of domination."<sup>125</sup> *Hyperpotentia*, as Dussel understands it, "effectively carries out the

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<sup>122</sup> It is worth clarifying that by attempting for a new system, the *people* are not revanchists but the unfinished promise of a new project capable of inaugurating the end of the present which is synonymous with exclusion and oppression. For Dussel, the *people* constitute the Other because they monitor the system's deficiencies from a different and exterior standpoint. A new system, following what politics (normatively speaking) is, would then become the project of reestablishing its possibility by a return. *People's* will-to-live is the only 'will' capable of overcoming the corrupted *potestas* to forge a new system.

<sup>123</sup> TTP, 4.

<sup>124</sup> TTP, 81.

<sup>125</sup> TTP, 81. If the will-to-live of the community is *potentia*, the will-to-live of the *people*, as the excluded and oppressed social bloc, is *hyperpotentia*.

transformation of *potestas*, now in service of the *people*.”<sup>126</sup> In such a context, the institutionalized and fetishized political power (*potestas*) becomes confronted by *people’s* power; which is manifested as a ‘state of rebellion.’

#### 4.5. The State of Rebellion and the Case of Puerto Rico

The ‘state of rebellion’ is the *people’s hyperpotentia* in action.<sup>127</sup> *People’s hyperpotentia* is expressed in diverse manners. Whether through passive or aggressive street protests or by using mass social networks to bring a strong and clear message to politicians and the corrupt system, *hyperpotentia* seeks to create a new system. The behavior of the *people’s hyperpotentia* depends on the common objective they strive for and the way they want to achieve it. Also, because states of rebellion are expressions of liberation, they can be different depending on the type of oppressed that make up the social bloc. Therefore, in order to be able to specify with an example what *hyperpotentia* consists of and what nuances it can take, let's look at the case of Puerto Rico in the summer of 2019.

On July 10, 2019, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested Puerto Rico’s former government officials after alleged corruption and embezzlement of federal funds directed to help the health and public education system in the archipelago.<sup>128</sup> In addition, the same day, the leak of private messages that the governor hold with members of his political cabinet using the app *Telegram* where they ridiculed and mocked citizens, members of his own political party, and the victims of hurricane Maria – one of

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<sup>126</sup> TTP, 81.

<sup>127</sup> TTP, 82.

<sup>128</sup> Univision and Agencies, “Detienen a exfuncionarios de Puerto Rico por presunta corrupción, entre ellos la exsecretaria de Educación,” Univision and agencies, July 10, 2019.

the most devastating Hurricanes Puerto Ricans have ever experienced in modern history – became public.<sup>129</sup> Both events aroused the *people* of Puerto Rico to being socially organized.

On July 13, 2019 the *people* took to the streets to demand Puerto Rico’s governor resignation. Despite the protests, Rosselló did not obey the *people*.<sup>130</sup> On July 17, 2019 the *people* got up again. Hundreds of thousands of citizens went to protest to Old San Juan, Puerto Rico’s capital, to call for the governor's resignation.<sup>131</sup> Even though the governor did not aim to resign, on July 24, 2019, the will of the *people* brought down Rosselló’s government power by forcing him to relinquish his political representation of Puerto Rico as governor.

In Dussel words, the will of the governor “ended up being annulled by a prior will: the will of the *people*, power as *hyperpotentia*.”<sup>132</sup> Through the state of rebellion, which were expressed by the *people* taking to the streets *en masse*, it might be stated that

The *people*, then, appears as a collective actor – neither substantive nor metaphysical, but conjunctural – as a “bloc” that manifests itself and disappears, in possession of the *new* power that lies below the praxis of anti-hegemonic liberation and the transformation of institutions.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> This not to mention that by early 2018 supporters of the current governor of Puerto Rico had shared problematic messages to discuss political issues through the *WhatsApp* app. Frances Rosario, “*Bullying* y tiraera en otro chat que se filtró del gobierno,” *Primera Hora*, July 10, 2019.

<sup>130</sup> Lyanne Meléndez García, “No voy a renunciar,” *Metro*, Friday, July 12, 2019. URL: <https://www.metro.pr/pr/noticias/2019/07/11/ricardo-rossello-no-voy-renunciar.html>

<sup>131</sup> DJ. King Artur, ‘Puerto Rico somos 500,000,’ YouTube. URL: <https://youtu.be/yATfI2HwiBY>

<sup>132</sup> TTP, 82.

<sup>133</sup> TTP, 82.

The *people* disappear ‘in possession of the *new* power,’ the new system, since *hyperpotentia*, which Dussel considers to be “the transformative capacity [...] of the *people*,”<sup>134</sup> once overcome the old and fetishized system becomes a liberatory power capable of creating a new political system.

As Dussel states, “*hyperpotentia*, however, only exists in itself.”<sup>135</sup> It arises as a state of rebellion formed by the *people* to question the existence of the corrupted organized political power (*potestas*). Thus, once the corrupted political power is brought down by *hyperpotentia* its task is accomplished. Now, at this point, “[o]nly triumphant social movements or an exceptional political leader [...] know what is feasible or infeasible or how to stretch the rope of transformation to the *maximum* without breaking it.”<sup>136</sup> That is, the state of rebellion is just a liberatory power appearing at critical political moments to solve certain problems. Once the political problem is solved, the state of rebellion ends, and a new system appears as a possible reality; it only would be made possible by ‘triumphant social movements or an exceptional political leader’ whose political agenda places the community and its political participation first.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

As we saw in this chapter, the *people* appear outside the corrupted system as the Other. The responsibility of the internal government towards the *people* is to hear their plea demanding the fulfillment of unfulfilled demands. Nevertheless, this does not occur since by the Totalization of the corrupted political system the *people* are excluded and oppressed. For

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<sup>134</sup> TTP, 90.

<sup>135</sup> TTP, 76.

<sup>136</sup> TTP, 90.

that reason, the *people* organize themselves to defeat the system through what Dussel called a 'state of rebellion.' This is exactly the opportunity for the *people* to reach the new system. In fact, it could be the beginning of a system created from and for the community, for the 'we.'

## Chapter 5. Conclusion: The Possibilities of a New System

When we speak of struggle and we mention the *people* we mean the vast unredeemed masses ... those who long for great and wise *changes* in all aspects of their life; the *people* who, to attain those changes, are ready to give even the very last breath they have when they believe in something or in someone, especially *when they believe in themselves* ... In terms of struggle, when we talk about the *people* we're talking about the six hundred thousand Cubans *without work* ...; the five hundred thousand *farms laborers* who live in miserable shacks ...; the four hundred thousand *industrial workers and laborers* ... whose salaries pass from the hands of the boss to those of the moneylender ...; the one hundred thousand small farmers who live and die working land that is not theirs, always looking at it with the sadness of *Moses gazing at the promised land* ... the thirty thousand teachers and professors ...; the twenty thousand small business men weighted down by debts ...; the ten thousand young professionals *people* ... anxious to work and full of hope ... These are the *people*, the ones who know misfortune and, therefore, are capable of fighting with limitless courage!

-- Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*

Following Castro, Dussel emphasizes that usually the *people* do not enjoy responsible listening to their shortages by those who represent them, turning them into victims of the system. Even though the democratic or participatory exercise of power must facilitate the attentive listening of the various voices composing the system, allowing political power not to be unidirectional from 'top to bottom' but 'horizontal,' some governments do not aim at bringing the citizenry the opportunity to exercise its political power beyond voting at political elections. For this reason, we must seek to reach the stage in which the unsatisfied demands of citizens are heard by the political authorities that govern them so that the communal system proposed by the Indigenous communities evaluated in this thesis is viable in Latin American countries.

Throughout this thesis work we study the Indigenous sense of community and how it permeates the socio-political system of Indigenous communities in Latin America (Chapter 2). Also, we recognized that the *people*, understood from a Latin American Indigenous standpoint, is a category that encompasses the unity of all the movements,

classes, sectors, etc., in political struggle in favor of and created by the must oppressed by the system (Chapter 3). Finally, following Dussel's approach to Levinas's notion of the Other, we concluded that the *people* are exterior to the corrupted institutionalized political power (*potestas*). In this manner, the *people* are the victims, the Other of the system. By means of *people's* will (*hyperpotentia*), a state of rebellion happens as the origin of the new possible system. This moment of revolution presents an opportunity for the *people* to be heard by the internal government (Chapter 4).

Whether the *people* will always act as the Other of the system depends on the collaboration between the internal government and the *people* to overcome the fetishized political system. Also, as long as there is no sense of political consensus as it is practiced by the Indigenous communities, the *people* will always practice *hyperpotentia* and express their demands through a state of rebellion.

### **5.1. New Challenges**

At the conclusion of this thesis project, I understand that the *people* will always express their demands through the 'state of rebellion' if the internal government and the community are divided. But, given this situation, I ask myself the following: Is there another option for the *people* to express their demands to the internal government without a 'state of rebellion' having to occur? For Dussel, the people are the victim, the Other of the system. The split between the community and the political representatives is not caused by the community, but by the internal government that has institutionalized political power (*potestas*) with the intention of practicing the 'will to power.' Thus, to avoid a 'state of rebellion,' the internal government must exercise its political responsibility to 'command by obeying' the community.



One of the challenges that the internal government will face if it decides to obey the people could be how to practice the ‘power of obedience’ in large communities where there are citizens living in distant or difficult to reach places. That is, if the internal government wants to practice the art of ‘command by obeying’ following the model practiced by the Indigenous communities, especially the Tojol ab’al, in which political decisions are always made by consensus through public meetings, where the political authorities must obey and put into practice the decisions made by the entire community. So how do you practice the Tojol ab’al style of consensus, for example, in communities with too many inhabitants?<sup>137</sup> Will community consensus only work in small communities? Could it be that the use of the media will allow us to politically interconnect communities with too many inhabitants?<sup>138</sup>

Secondly, the new political system that practices Indigenous communal sense could function by following the system of *voceros* (spokespersons) practiced by Venezuela and called the “Organic Law of Popular Power”. The *voceros* are citizens who commit themselves to public policy to serve as a bridge between the community councils and the state. In this way, they give attention to the *people* by giving “voice in local, state, regional, and national governance.”<sup>139</sup> Since in this context the community will be represented by *voceros*, it is easier for large and/or remote communities to participate politically in both

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<sup>137</sup> The Tojolabal community living in Chiapas, Mexico, has about 1,500-2,000 habitants. For more information on the *tojolabales* see, Hadlynn Cuadriello Olivos and Rodrigo Megchún Rivera, *Tojolabales: Pueblos indígenas del México contemporáneo*, México, CDI: 2006.

<sup>138</sup> For more information on how consensus is affected by the size of the group see, Paul Hare, "A Study of Interaction and Consensus in Different Sized Groups," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Jun., 1952), pp. 261-267 Published by: American Sociological Association Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2088071>

<sup>139</sup> According to the ex-president of Venezuela Hugo Chávez, the citizenry is protagonist through active political participation. There is no power coming from above but from below. See Frederick B. Mills, “Chavista theory of transition towards the communal state,” openDemocracy, July 22, 2015. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/chavista-theory-of-transition-towards-communal-state/>

local and state politics. In this way, political power does not end up being monopolized as it usually happens when only political authorities make important decisions and execute projects for communities without first consulting them.

Finally, I ask myself: Since we want a political system where obediential power is put into practice through the political authorities, how do we educate and train the political authorities so that they are prepared to carry out such work? The total renovation of the political system is imperative so that no citizen is left out of political participation. In this way we prevent the *people* from rising up as the forgotten and oppressed Other of the system. Once politics is not corrupted and the whole community participates in political matters through political decision-making by consensus, the idea of a just politics will not only be an ideal but can be made concrete in reality.

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## **Vita**

Erick Javier Padilla Rosas, born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, received his bachelor's degree from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus. He decided to enter the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Louisiana State University where his research interests in Latin American and Caribbean Philosophy, Theology, and Indigenous Cosmovision have been strengthened. Upon completion of his master's degree, he will begin teaching in a Community College or High School.